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22 February –
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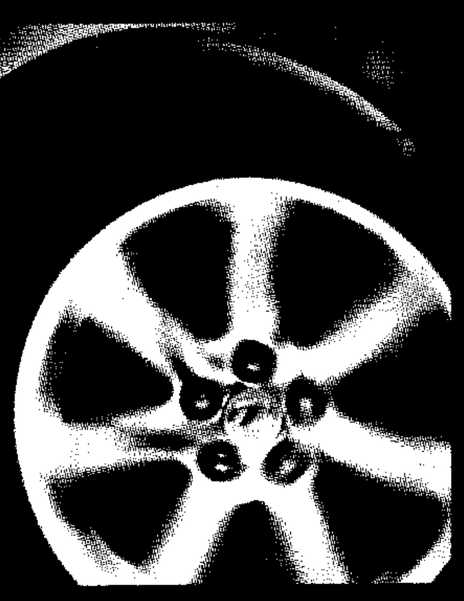

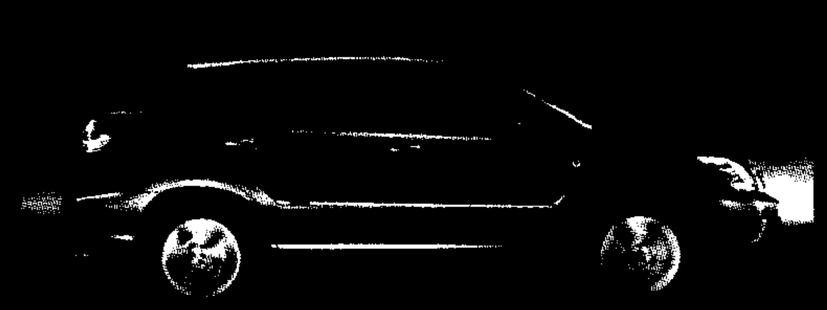

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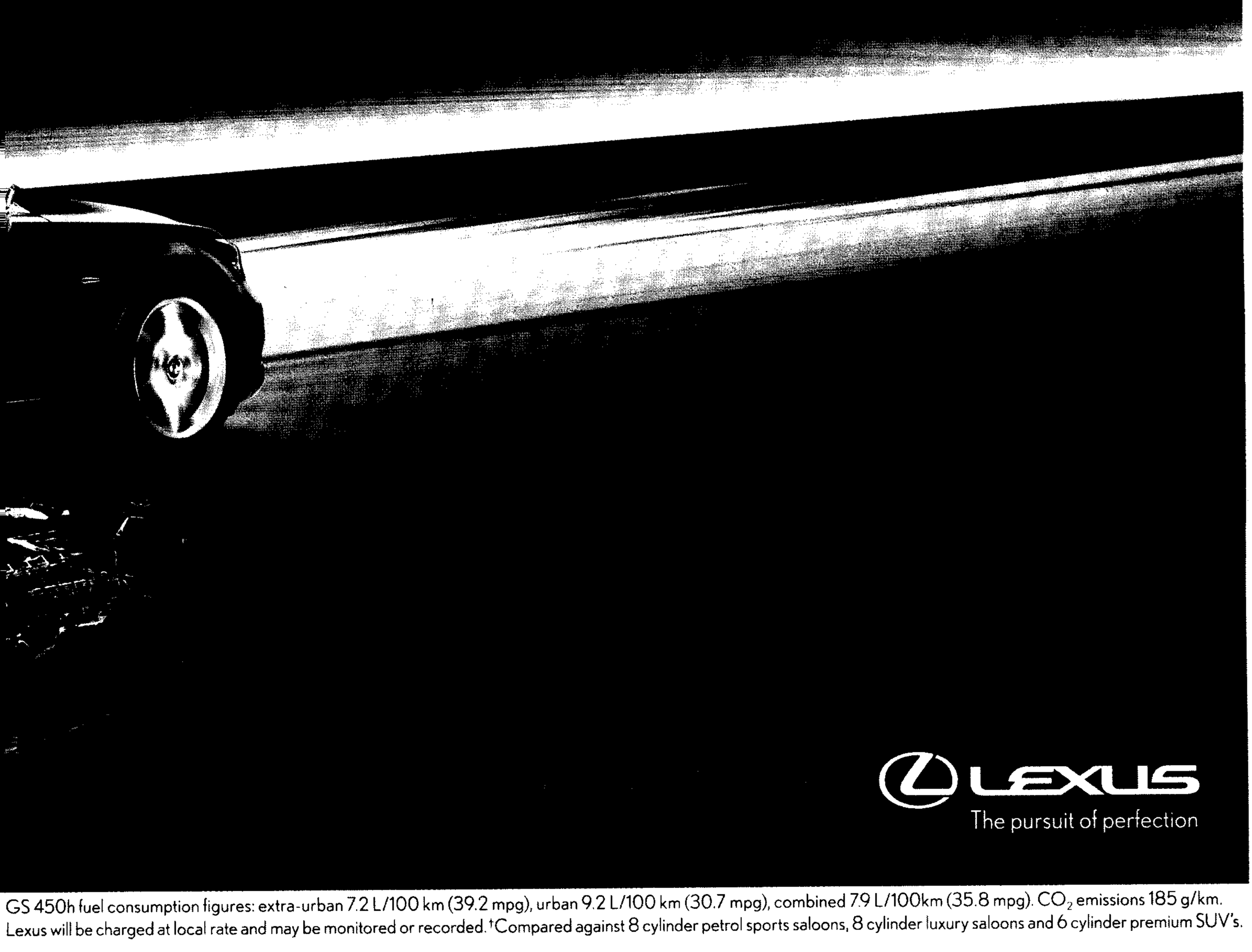

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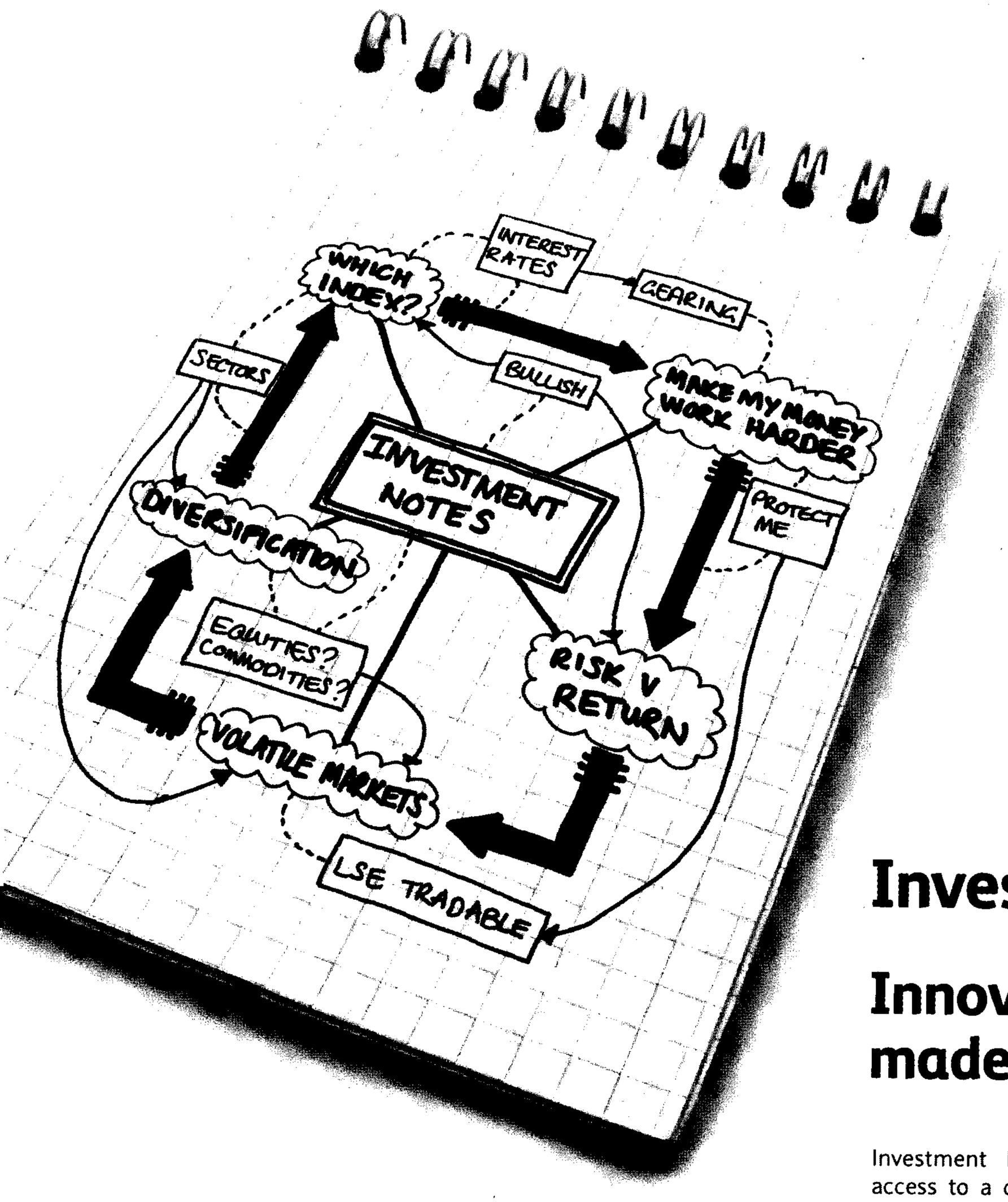

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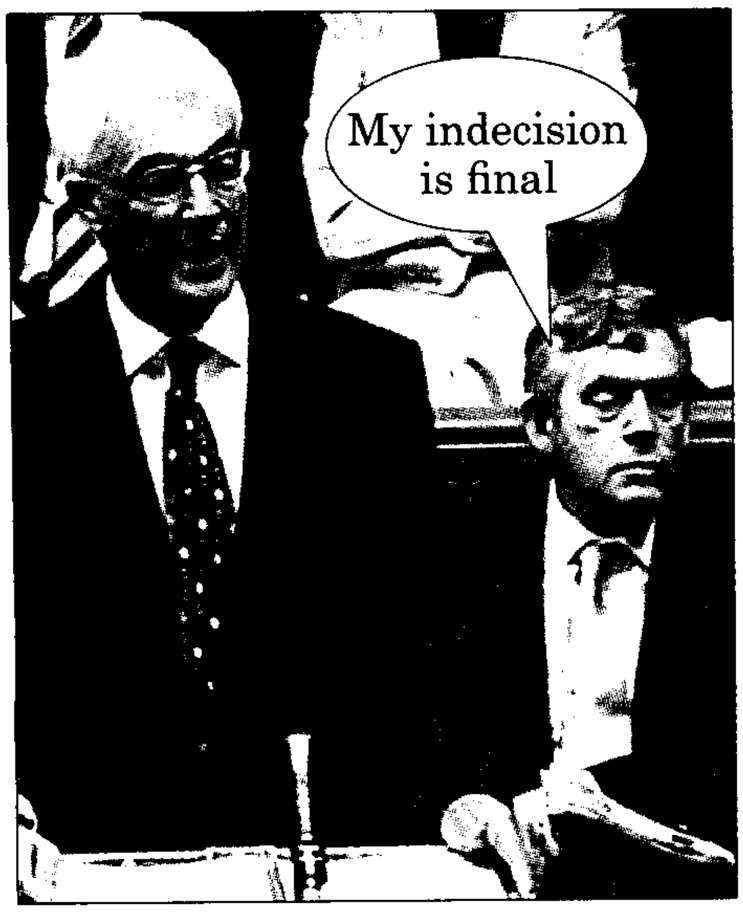

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ABC

THE nationalisation of Northern Rock, bringing £100bn of debt on to the government's books, blows apart any justification for the private finance initiative.

Public debt now exceeds the 40 percent of GDP limit imposed by Gordon Brown's "sustainable investment" rule by around 5 percent, a breech hitherto unthinkable.

A couple of years ago, defence secretary Des Browne (prompted by then Treasury minister Ed Balls) justified PFI by claiming that exceeding the limit "would put the country in a position in which it could not meet the sustainable investment rule and thus could not invest further in public services and our infrastructure". PFI's off-balance sheet magic was thus essential (even though PFI debt is less than half that of Northern Rock).

So has the Rock scuppered all investment in public services? Of course not. The 40 percent rule was only ever there to flatter Gordon's figures. PFI, and the wreckage left in its wake, were never needed.

● *The full story – Slicker p. 31.*

HAVE YOUR SAY

"An utter failure of the FSA, Treasury and Bank of England"

Phill Space, Tring

Send us your comments

BBC News website

CONTRARY to Alistair Darling's cowardly assertion that the loss of child benefit discs containing the personal details of millions of Britons was down to one junior official, the blame can be directly traced to the very top.

Private Eye has learned that the Child Benefit Office in Washington, Tyne and Wear, used to have an important employee among its staff: an "individual security specialist" who would have handled the transfer of sensitive data to auditors. There was also an "assurance team" responsible for vetting data transfers.

Alas, these staff disappeared under perhaps the most counter-productive policy even Gordon Brown has devised: the "efficiency" review implemented from 2004 to compete with the Tories' crude onslaught on "faceless bureaucrats".

Thus when an official who would normally have dealt with data transfer went on leave, an inexperienced colleague stepped in and, in answer to a request from the National Audit Office which itself breached protocols, made the mistake of sticking two discs in the post. With the jobs of the staff who would have overseen the process had gone, the nearest data protection officer was 120 miles away… in Preston!

PS: The "sorry we've screwed up again" letters alone cost taxpayers £3m – which would pay for a dozen data protection officers for a decade. So much for Brownian "efficiency".

SILLY FUGGERS!

THE following is a list of people whom Mohammed Fayed had accused at the Princess Diana inquest of being involved in an alleged conspiracy to assassinate her or cover up her murder by the time the Eye went to press at lunchtime on Monday:

Paul Burrell; Lady Sarah McCorquodale, Diana's sister; Detective Inspector Roger Milburn of Scotland Yard; David Veness, former Assistant Commissioner, Specialist Operations for the Met Police, now an Under-Secretary General of the United Nations; toxicologist Dr Gilbert Pepin; pathologist Professor Dominique Lecomte; deceased chauffeur Henri Paul; the French intelligence services; the French police; deceased photographer James Andanson; Diana's friend Rosa Monckton; her brother; Prince Philip; possibly Prince Charles (although Mr Fayed was very clear that "he participated in it", he then said within minutes that "I have no idea if he is involved or not, maybe"); two members of staff at the British Embassy called Spearman and Langham (the latter may or may not be related to a previously-cited figure, Nicholas Langman); David Ogilvy, the 13th Earl of Airlie, who was Lord Chamberlain in 1997; the members of Buckingham Palace's "Way Ahead" group (the Duke of York, the Princess Royal and Prince Edward, but specifically not the Queen who "I don't think is important in that"); French judge Hervé Stéphan; the CIA; the US National Security Agency; "not all, but some" of the medical team which treated Diana in the ambulance; Sir Michael Jay, then Ambassador to France; former commissioners of the Metropolitan Police Lords Stevens and Condon; Diana's divorce lawyer Lord Mischon; Diana's brother-in-law Lord Fellowes; French public prosecutor Maud Coujard; the late Tiny Rowland; Mr Justice Cresswell of the high court; Lord Justice Auld of the court of appeal; Jack Straw; the Inland Revenue; the Home Office; and his former security employees Trevor Rees-Jones, Kes Wingfield and Ben Murrel.

As coroner Lord Justice Scott Baker observed: "There were a very large number of people in this conspiracy on your account."

Despite Mr Fayed's claim that "I got all the proofs. Basically not the proofs, but all the circumstances and the cover-ups", there is still a danger that the jury may rule that the Princess was not murdered. If so, the ensuing libel cases could keep him at the high court for some time…

WHY has the *Financial Times* gone ape over Alistair Darling's non-dom proposals (to great effect, it seems, judging by his backtracking over the already modest plans)?

For weeks the *FT* has run page after page supporting the whinges of various privileged groups who threaten to leave tax haven Britain for Monaco or Zurich. By coincidence, proprietor Marjorie Scardino, chief executive of *FT* owner Pearson, happens to be an American national who has lived in the UK for a decade and would be perfectly qualified for non-dom status.

Does Scardino take advantage of this and have much to gain from her paper's line on the subject? A Pearson spokesman refused to comment on "personal matters".

The *Times*' stablemate the *Sun* also waded into the non-dom row, declaring in its leader column: "Wealthy business leaders should not be taxed on off-shore earnings."

And did it have any particular wealthy business leader in mind? Surely not a certain Australian-American who has used a complex web of offshore tax havens in the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands and the Dutch Antilles to ensure the profits made by his international media empire constantly elude the Revenue!

● *Silly Buggers & The Sadiq Khan Inquiry p. 30.*

NEWS

MILLIONS of pounds have disappeared. Inspector Knacker has been called in. The reputation of the London Development Agency (LDA) is in tatters. But, according to mayor Ken Livingstone, it is all a "racist smear campaign". If only!

The latest concerns centre on former LDA board member Yvonne Thompson, who administered the catchily-named European Federation of Black Women Business Owners (EFBWBO). This received £30,000 from the LDA; but accounts signed off by Thompson state that the organisation "received no income and incurred no expenditure" in the years in question.

Serious inconsistencies have become apparent in LDA records. For example, in response to a freedom of information request last year, the LDA issued a complete list of all grants issued between 2000 and 2006. In January it issued another list to London Assembly members. The two lists give different accounts of what money was paid to whom!

Neither mentions the £30,000 to the EFBWBO, though this is listed in the LDA's annual reports. Word is that the LDA's records before 2003 are so incomplete as to be useless. And managing the crisis is almost impossible for the mayor's army of spin doctors because they don't know where the next revelation is coming from.

'Newthound'

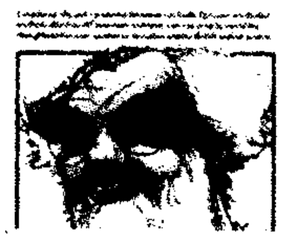
BAE Systems is so desperate to make the arms trade look fluffy it's using teddy bears to win the hearts of school children.

Under a British Council-backed education initiative linking schools near its Hawk factories in Yorkshire with schools in India (which buys BAE jet trainers for its air force), bears and dolls in school uniform are going on school exchanges.

"The bears will go on a journey around the schools bringing back exciting stories of their adventures to their home school," says the plan.

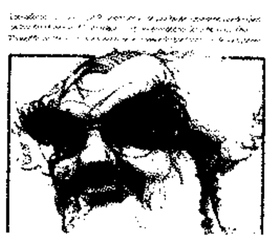
JUST FANCY THAT!

Rowan Williams
Man of the cloth or clot of a man?



Observer 10 Feb. p. 28

Rowan Williams
A quiet man who said too much



Observer 10 Feb. p. 49

NUMBER CRUNCHING

Divorce settlement Heather Mills will accept, according to the press...

£10m *Mail on Sunday*
£25m *Mirror*
£40m *Sunday Times*
£55m *Telegraph*
£60m *Express*
£70m *Times*
£74m *Mail*
£80m *News of the World*
£100m *Star*

Street Of Shame

MYSTIC MOGGERY 1

EVERYTHING seemed to be going rather well for Senator Barack Obama until this Monday, when he received what every politician dreads – the Blessing of Mystic Mogg.

"It is hard to see who can stop Senator Barack Obama becoming the next President of the United States," the Somerset Seer chirruped in his *Times* column. But Obama shouldn't quit the race in despair: Rees-Mogg may yet change his mind. Little more than a month ago, on 13 January, the great soothsayer told *Mail on Sunday* readers that although an Obama-McCain presidential battle would be the most exciting since Kennedy-Nixon, "the actual contest is more likely to be Clinton-Huckabee".

Rees-Mogg now claims that when Obama wins he'll be the "first black President of the United States". Shome mishtake shurely? Here's what Mystic Mogg wrote in September 1995: "Colin Powell is a black Eisenhower. Like Eisenhower in 1951 he will defer announcing his candidature for the presidency until his chosen moment; like Eisenhower, he will win the Republican nomination... like Eisenhower, he will be elected by a large majority in 1996." And, if Mogg said it would happen, we may be sure that it did.

MYSTIC MOGGERY 2

"THE rescue of **Northern Rock...** will probably be seen with hindsight as one of the more successful crisis management exercises in the chequered history of modern central banking. As Mr King [Bank of England governor] noted in last week's Treasury Committee interrogation, no depositor has lost money and a potentially catastrophic threat to the British banking system has been averted. Moreover, Mr King could have added, the crisis has been resolved at what will almost certainly be zero cost to the public purse."

– Anatole Kaletsky, the *Times*,
24 September 2007.

"All in all, what Mr Darling announced yesterday was a financial and political disaster of almost unimaginable proportions. The Northern Rock saga did not end yesterday; the fiasco has only just started."

– Anatole Kaletsky, the *Times*,
18 February 2008.

RECESSION really is upon us: even David Blunkett has been obliged to take a pay-cut. The latest register of members' interests reveals that Rebekah Wade has slashed the annual fee for his *Sun* column from £150,000 to £105,000.

But some things about the column never change – notably Beardie's inability to declare his interests. Last week's offering was another attack on opponents of identity cards. "Nothing will stop the scaremongering and misinformation," he sighed. Some critics even suggest the cards could be forged: "This is complete rubbish."

Yet again, Blunkett somehow forgot to mention that since last March he has been chairman of the international advisory committee of Entrust Inc, the Texas-based security company which hopes to provide software for the British ID card system.

Why so coy? Surely Beardie isn't worried that if Rebekah learns about his well-paid job at Entrust she'll cut his *Sun* salary even further.

THE *Sun* really couldn't make up its mind about heartbroken singer Cheryl Cole and her famous figure.

Valentine's Day brought a shock exclusive – Cole had been pictured looking "SKELETAL" and "PENCIL-THIN" while on holiday in Thailand following her split from footballer Ashley Cole.

"Friends of his devastated missus voiced fears that her weight has plunged to a terrifying SIX STONE," the paper fretted. "The 24-year-old Girls Aloud pin-up has been refusing to eat and chain-smoking on a Thai island as she fades into a sad shadow of the pop world beauty."

One day and a slap-up dinner later, the next morning's *Sun* brought the cheering news that "the stunning singer larked around on a Thai beach... She looked well, tanned, was joking–and appeared to be showing Chelsea ace Ashley, 27, just what he is missing."

Whoops! Stand by your sick buckets – 16 February rolled around with yet more exclusive pictures: "Gaunt Cheryl Cole leaves her holiday bolthole in Thailand... The star, 24–whose weight is feared to have fallen to 6st–flew from Phuket to LA. An onlooker said: 'She looked terribly thin. It's sad'."

Hold on, though – there was good news for yo-yo dieters everywhere in Monday's *Sun*: "Sexy Cheryl Cole shows cheating husband exactly what he's missing on a Hollywood night out... Curvy Cheryl, 24, wowed a string of men in LA."

Expect the first "Cheryl obesity shocker" in the *Sun* by the end of the week...

OILY *Sun* hack Oliver Harvey told smugly how "thousands of readers" backed the paper's campaign to "bring back justice to the streets of Britain" after his undercover derring-do showed just how easy it is to buy a gun. Harvey bravely posed alongside mask-wearing thug "Duke", clutching a large pistol.

Harvey was rather less cocky when a similar number of readers subsequently rang to point out that the £200 killing machine was, in fact, an air pistol. And worse was to come. Rupert Murdoch so loved the story of gun-crime Blighty that he demanded that the by-now-quaking hack personally deliver a copy of his exclusive story to Gordon Brown.

A white-faced Harvey immediately rang his boss, Victoria Newton, to admit that the story was, ahem, more complicated than he first thought. "Oliver," snapped back Newton. "I'm on my way to see Rupert right now. Don't tell me any more." Harvey may need rather more than his trusty old Spudmatic when the Dirty Digger next rides into town.

HACKS at the *Independent* arrived at work two weeks ago to find 16 huge plasma TV screens in the newsrooms. Whoops of joy quickly gave way to gnashing of teeth as they learned that the 42-inch behemoths were allowed to display only one thing – the *Indie*'s website.

While some hacks blocked out the flickering distraction with home-made cardboard shields on their computer monitors, one tried a more direct solution by simply switching off the screen nearest his desk.

Whoops! Within minutes, all staff received this stern warning from editor-in-chief Simon "Pussy" Kelner: "Dear All, You will have noticed that plasma screens carrying our website are now a long-awaited feature of, and improvement to, our newsroom. They are vital to the work of a 21st-century newspaper... They are there at my behest, and I have not authorised anyone to switch them off."

Never mind what this does to the carbon footprint of the greener-than-thou *Indie* – how can a poverty-stricken rag afford such luxuries? Oddly enough, on the day the screens arrived a sub-editor noticed a full page advert for Currys was going in the next day's paper, offering special deals on 42-inch plasma screens. Glancing at the "flat plan" of advertising he saw that the advert was marked "Free of charge". Pure coincidence, no doubt...

"I can't stop writing pieces about bingeing"

ANOTHER corking week for the *Daily Mail*. First, Amanda Platell played judge and jury with Lewis Sproston, the boyfriend of murdered model Sally Anne Bowman. He's clearly a wrong 'un, she reckoned, because he is "an unmarried father of three daughters by two different mothers".

Sproston is, in fact, childless. Platell had muddled him up with murder suspect Mark Dixie. Still, he does wear trainers with a suit à la Macca, which is clearly enough to damn him.

Not be bested, *Mail* hack Paul Scott outed Tom Jones's seldom-seen wife Linda after a rare public sighting. "She cut a distinctly drab figure," he wrote. "Wearing baggy black trousers and T-shirt, and carrying a 'Big Shopper' style bag, her mottled green fleece was more Matalan than Malibu. It is an image a million miles from the type of Hollywood wife one might imagine seeing on the arm of a man who is reputed to have amassed a £190 million fortune." That, at least, was to prove eerily accurate.

Snake-hipped Jones has coughed to many things over the years – adulterous romps, plastic surgery, even knicker facials -- but never incest. The "drab figure" pictured at his side was, er, his sister.

THE *Daily Mail* is obsessed with the case of jailed mercenary Simon Mann – and with one detail in particular. The paper claimed last week that he was extradited from Zimbabwe to Equatorial Guinea "at the request of dictator Teodoro Obiang Nguema, who reportedly vowed he would personally sodomise Mann and skin him alive".

Reportedly? Actually no other paper anywhere in the world has reported this. Paul Dacre, by contrast, is so excited by the prospect of Mann being sodomised and skinned alive that he published no fewer than four pieces referring to it in less than a week – a clue, perhaps, that he will soon need another spell of "sick-leave" to give his poor palpitating heart a rest.

HISTORY does not appear to be the *Daily Mail*'s strongest subject at the moment.

On 2 February it devoted a double-page spread to how "The 50th anniversary of the Munich air crash takes one writer back to the glorious days before the beautiful game was corrupted by money, run by crooks and played by overpaid, sex-obsessed cheats."

But not quite far back enough, as it happens. As the paper was sheepishly forced to admit three days later, the photograph of the squad "leaving England on their fateful trip" actually showed the 1959 squad, 18 months after the tragedy.

IS THIS a first? A man was last week thrown out of the legendary French Pub in Soho for swearing and being drunk.

Er... isn't that the whole point of the French Pub? The 68-year-old man, believed to be an Italian professor, was celebrating 45 years as a contributor to a popular satirical magazine based nearby...

"I SPENT last night at Sadler's Wells, watching the exhilarating choreography of German dancer Pina Bausch on the opening night of *Rites of Spring* and *Café Muller*," mused Charlotte Ross in the London *Evening Standard*.

She did so in the regular "out and about" spot that editor Veronica Wadley forces her columnists to include to prove that they ever go anywhere near London. "Bausch, at 67, even gave her own graceful, long-limbed performance. The whole spectacle took only two hours – but that was long enough to remind me of the transformative power of art."

Transformative indeed... just pages previously, the *Standard* reported that "Dancer and choreographer Pina Bausch disappointed fans when she failed to perform at Sadler's Wells in the London premiere last night of *Café Muller*. A spokesman said they did not know why she didn't perform or if she would dance in next week's shows."

LAST WEEK'S obsequies for much-loved prankster Jeremy Beadle led to a sad falling-out between two of his dearest friends, the *Express* boss Richard "Dirty" Desmond and the *Daily Mail*'s gorblimey specialist Richard Littlejohn.

Most speakers at the two-hour funeral talked only of Beadle and his family. Not so Dirty Des, who punctuated his tribute with lengthy boasts about his own success (as "the world's greatest publisher", no less) and ceaseless plugs for his TV stations, newspapers and magazines.

Then Littlejohn got up. "How do I follow that?" he asked, joking that Desmond's speech had "more plugs than Currys". A furious Dirty Des missed the wake at the Beadle family home afterwards, deciding to go straight back to his office. The next day he was still fuming about Littlejohn and cursing every time he mentioned the name.

If only Beadle were still around he could act as peacemaker. In his absence, friends are hoping millionaire trivia-expert Mitch Symons will don the blue helmet. It's what Jeremy would have wanted.

Relieved officials from Sarkozy's ruling UMP party yesterday hoped the quick wedding and Bruni's new official status would stem his plummeting approval ratings. At 41%, they are his lowest ratings since his election – and owe much to his slowness to push through convincing economic reforms and his very pubic romance.

Grauniad

AMONG the many puff pieces in the *Daily Star* for Richard "Dirty" Desmond's other publications, recent plugs have featured *OK!* magazine's German launch.

"*OK!* is now in 15 countries – it's a dream come true for me," gushed Herr Desmond, shaking the hand of Hamburg mayor Ole Von Beust. Is this the same Dirty Des who, back in April 2004, reacted to a possible German takeover of the *Daily Telegraph* by declaring that all Germans were "fucking Nazis" and then goose-stepping round the *Telegraph* boardroom during a meeting about their jointly-owned printworks?

Outraged *Telegraph* executives walked out in disgust – serenaded by Des and his lackeys singing "Deutschland über Alles" while making "Sieg Heil" salutes. No doubt the mayor of Hamburg and *OK!*'s German readers are eagerly awaiting a repeat performance of *Des Does Deutsch*.

At last week's Bafta ceremony he proved he can still do it when in the mood. After having his picture taken with minor film star Cuba Gooding Jnr, Desmond collared a young hackette from *Closer* magazine, recently purchased by the German media company Bauer. "So," he inquired, "what's it like working for the Nazis, then?"

HACKWATCH MASTERCLASS

Write features the Daily Mail way...

IT'S one of the toughest challenges for any trainee hack: how do you come up with an attention-grabbing intro?

Luckily there's an easy solution: study the opening sentences of a true professional, top *Daily Mail* feature writer **Jane Fryer**.

Here, for example, is how Fryer began a feature on 8 December 2005: "A freezing February day in 1978 and in a windswept graveyard in the tiny Bavarian town of Klingenberg, a huge crowd gathered, huddled close against the biting wind and rain."

See? You're hooked already. Now read on...

13 May 2006: "A beautiful sunny afternoon on the seafront in Portsmouth, and I am being left for dead by a balding German pensioner on a 50-year-old bicycle..."

16 May: "A cold, blustery May morning on top of London's Primrose Hill, and the founder of the Cloud Appreciation Society and I are desperately searching for silver linings."

27 May: "A sunny afternoon in a Gloucestershire car park and we're ready for battle..."

3 July: "A sunny afternoon in a farmhouse kitchen in Aberdeenshire and I am being ritually humiliated by three middle-aged housewives..."

14 July: "A sweltering Tuesday night in Milan's San Siro stadium and I am involved in a bizarre, heated and highly unlikely argument..."

17 July: "A sticky July afternoon and I am secreted behind a small wooden trellis in Selfridges' basement..."

22 July: "The river Thames on the hottest day of the year: dragonflies dip and dive, swans glide and semi-naked bodies bask in the scorching sun..."

22 August: "A cold, rainy and alarmingly bracing Thursday morning and I am bobbing about in the middle of the choppy, black ocean..."

7 September: "A sunny afternoon in a computer-strewn office in Norwich and I am struggling to bond with a middle-aged bald man..."

16 September: "A muggy Thursday morning in Croydon and the High Street is packed."

2 November: "A cold and blustery afternoon in a south Berlin suburb and Stefan Hamberger is slumped in his doorway, gawping at his visitor."

20 January 2007: "A dreary afternoon in Leeds and I am being used as a human barbell by the world's strongest man."

6 March: "A miserable March afternoon and Brighton beach is deserted..."

5 May: "A gorgeous May morning and the Devon lanes are flanked with luscious banks of cow parsley, cowslips and bluebells."

19 May: "A bright sunny evening in a posh London restaurant. The music is on low, the candles are lit..."

22 June: "Midnight on Midsummer's Eve and I'm standing in a soggy field in Wiltshire..."

5 October: "A bright day in Wolverhampton. The sky is blue, the sun is out, the birds are singing..."

13 October: "A gorgeous day in Aberdeenshire – the sun is out, the North Sea is twinkling, the birds are singing."

24 November: "A stormy day on a fishing boat on the North Sea just off the coast of Shetland. The sky is steel grey, the waves are crashing and smashing..."

11 February 2008: "A crisp, sunny day in Northamptonshire and Rob Plosky is waving a rat in my face..."

So there it is, student journalists: read, learn and inwardly digest Jane Fryer's pioneering work and you too could be on Paul Dacre's payroll! Even if you don't make it as a feature writer, at least you'll be well qualified to compile the weather report.

EX-LABOUR ministers don't become heads of anti-poverty groups anymore. Nor do they campaign for better safety law or fairer housing, or join the crusade for workers' rights. Like Tony Blair and Patricia Hewitt (see last *Eye*), they follow the money to the City instead.

● Former **environment minister Barry Gardiner** is still an MP but now has a £15,000 part-time job advising private bank **Reynolds Partners**. The firm is particularly keen on energy investment, including nuclear, and makes a virtue of the fact that Gardiner was once a trade minister in charge of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. Reynolds Partners has lobbied the government to ensure that the public supports (ie pays for) the "end disposal of waste" from new atomic stations so the "overall project economics" are not "overwhelmed" by high costs.

● Former **development secretary Baroness Amos** is now a director of **Travant Capital Partners**, a Nigerian private equity firm run by ex-HSBC banker **Osaze Osifo.**

● **The millionaire ex-chief whip Lord Evans,** one-time assistant to Lord Levy as a Labour fundraiser, is now an adviser to **EFG**, a Swiss private bank specialising in holding millionaires' accounts. The bank offers customers a chance to "structure your wealth".

THE first paper from Labour-linked think tank IPPR's "Commission on National Security" was packed with scary ideas and warned of myriad threats.

Going beyond the predictions of even the most doom-mongering cabinet minister, "The New Front Line" paper gave much space to the possibility that "terrorist groups will illegally acquire either a ready-made nuclear weapon, a so-called 'loose nuke', or the fissile material required to make one". In places the paper read like a Jack Bauer fantasy. But why has the IPPR become so anxious?

The IPPR's "Security Commission" is one of its most high-powered gatherings, with Paddy Ashdown, George Robertson, Charles Guthrie and many other big names on board. It is also one of IPPR's better-funded programmes, receiving money from Raytheon, De La Rue, Booz Allen Hamilton and EDS.

Some of these companies already make millions from the homeland security boom in the US, so perhaps it's no surprise the IPPR seems intent on scaring everyone to death here too.

CHRIS PHILP's successful bid to become Tory parliamentary candidate in Hampstead and Kilburn made much of his record as a "successful local businessman" and employer.

A former chairman of the Bow Group, he helped run the party's NHS campaign in the 2005 election and won the Ernst & Young "Entrepreneur of the Future" award. "As a local businessman and Camden councillor, I have a track record of winning tough elections and delivering for local people."

Alas, it all wrong this month when Clearstone, his haulage training company, went under owing thousands of pounds to trainee HGV drivers. The administration came just months after the firm was saved from collapse by investment from RCapital.

Staff were made redundant; and drivers who had paid more than £1,000 upfront for courses have been told in a letter they will have to wait to see if they get any money back as creditors. "At this stage it appears unlikely".

CALLED TO ORDURE

NOW that people are waking up to the uselessness of Speaker Michael Martin, it may be time to examine the House of Commons Commission, a shadowy body with which Martin and a few unreconstructed cronies control the Palace of Westminster.

The commission – which last year plotted to exempt MPs from the freedom of information act – likes to operate in the dark but every few weeks it has to answer a handful of questions in the Commons. These questions are fielded by one of its members, Nick Harvey (Lib Dem MP for North Devon). Ex-PR man Harvey is one of life's establishment wafflers, seldom happier than when spending public money.

Harvey's job was previously done by Lib Dem Archy Kirkwood who was knighted and even given a peerage. Is Harvey hoping that if he keeps the canoe steady he, too, might soon pick up a "handle"? His Commons answers over the past year depict a commission which is long overdue some serious reform.

12 March: Harvey is asked how much the commission has spent on office space since 1990. Answer: £234m went on Portcullis House, the notoriously opulent new building opposite Big Ben. The commission is also spending £5.4m a year on extra offices for MPs. "Accommodation services" (repairs, etc) last year came to £24.7m. Amid such vast sums, few seem to notice that £422,000 is being blown on a short glass walkway to stop MPs getting wet after parking their cars.

23 April: There is a proposal to introduce "motion-sensitive" devices to a small escalator serving Portcullis House. Harvey proclaims its "energy-efficient" nature but says it will cost, er, £327,000. Another £31,533 has been spent servicing the escalator in just six years.

4 June: The energy efficiency lark is catching on. Sharon Hodgson (Lab) asks if the Commons could be powered by wind. (*Flatulence, surely? Ed.*) Harvey prosaically says that the commission has met "representatives of the microgeneration industries and we are exploring the practicalities". In other words: a salesman was here the other day giving us the hard yacker. Someone else raises motion-sensitive lights. Alas, these were tried but MPs kept being plunged into darkness in their offices if they did not move around enough. Too much post-prandial snoozing, obviously.

Hugh Bayley (Lab) wonders how much the commission spends on "emerging democracies". Harvey offers "a total identifiable cost of about £200,000" a year. Of this 10 percent is blown on foreign jollies, presumably showing third world countries how they, too, might set up a version of the House of Commons commission. Meanwhile, it is disclosed that the commission employs 85 people on salaries of more than £60,000. Trebles all round!

28 June: The commission has been buying art work. Its acquisition budget is £188,124.68. Harvey says that "a large proportion has already been committed" to buying pictures from the estate of the late Lord Stratford (aka Tony Banks, MP). Do let's keep it in the political family.

23 July: How much has the commission spent on legal fees? Rather a lot: £1.25m since 2003. Legal work included "advice on MPs' allowances and expenses".

9 Oct: Yet more loot for m'learned friends. The commission has "endorsed the Speaker's use of the firm Carter Ruck to counteract a series of articles that were published in the media which questioned the impartiality of the Speaker in his official role. The cost of this advice was £18,696.06."

Some "refreshment department consultants" have also been approved. They will conduct "an operational and financial benchmarking review", asking "around 35 MPs" and some others what they think of the caffs and bars at Westminster. This will cost £6,950. The benchmarking review will cost "up to £26,250.

Over the summer recess some £2m has been spent tarting up the Commons press gallery and canteen – but hacks so hate the trendy new caff (bacon sarnies and rock buns forbidden) that takings plummet. One for the "benchmarking review", perhaps.

28 Nov: The commission spent £10m last year on "library services" for MPs. This is five times what was spent in 1987.

3 Dec: Harvey announces that the commission spent just £379,000 last year on the Office of the Standards Commissioner – effectively the MPs' policeman. Compare this to what is being lavished on a new Visitor Reception Building for the Commons. Work is already behind schedule and the estimated cost of £8.7m is looking iffy. Harvey says a further £1m will be spent on "reviewing the lessons learned" from the cock-up. The Standards Commissioner doesn't deserve such largesse, does he? Nasty man asking nasty questions.

4 Feb, 2008: How many press officers does the commission employ? In 2001 it was one part-timer. Now there are nine souls in the "Commons Media and Communications Service".

6 Feb: The commission has been spending our money again, this time on a carbon offset payment scheme when MPs fly abroad (their favourite activity). Last year the bill came to £26,025.50.

7 Feb: How right we were not to believe that builders' quotation on the Visitor Centre. "The cost is now estimated at £11.2m," says Harvey. He blames "technical difficulties". Not "straightforward incompetence" by the commission, then.

'Gavel Basher'

JULES PECK, director of David Cameron's "quality of life commission", has just improved his own quality of life by joining lobbyist Edelman. He will work for two days a week for the lobbyist while still running Cameron's commission.

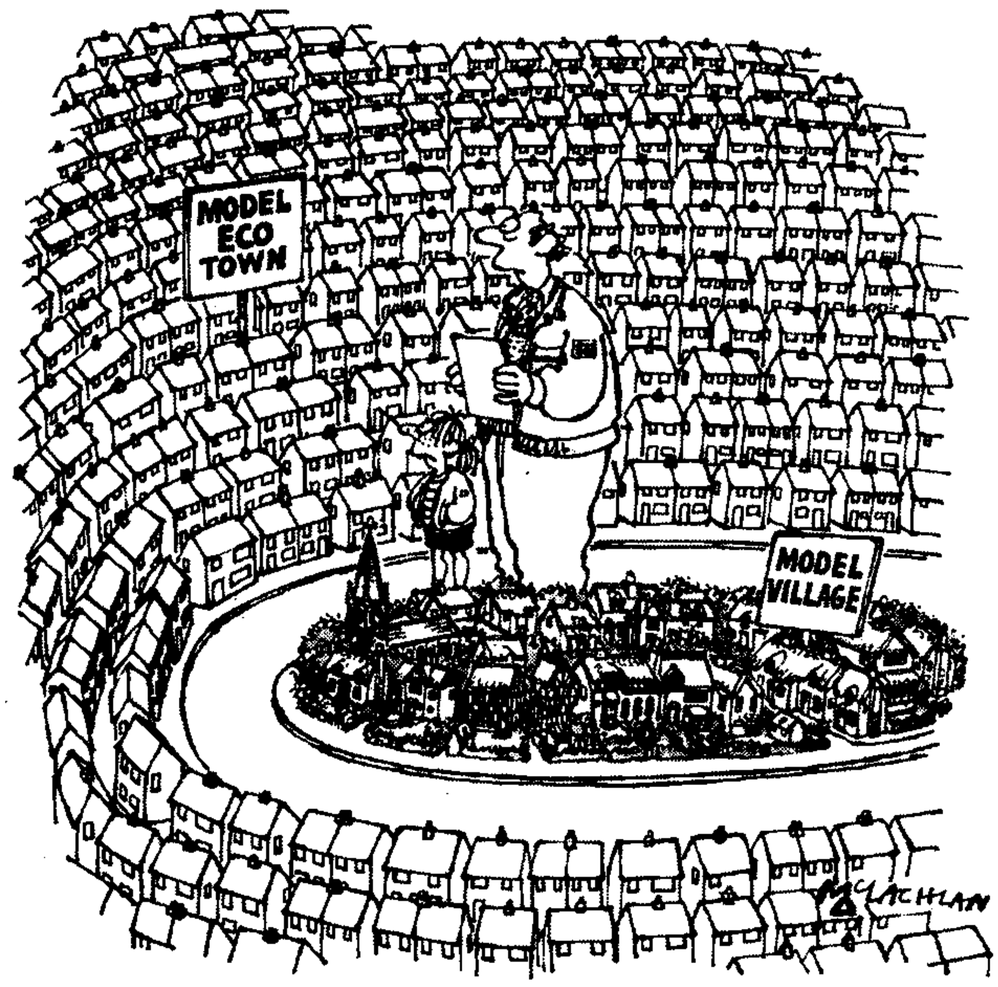
Hiring Peck, former environment director of the World Wildlife Fund, helped Cameron look caring and green. However, his new job at Edelman could put the green guru at the service of some consume-a-lot, pollute-a-lot firms. Edelman's clients include junk food giants such as Pepsico and the Snack and Crisps Manufacturers Association. They also include South West Water, which was fined by the Environment Agency for pouring sewage into the River Dart just days after Peck's Edelman appointment.

HOUSE WHINE

THE Home Counties are not the only place falling victim to the government's enthusiasm for building vast numbers of new houses at any cost, riding roughshod over local objections.

Councils in the West Midlands have put forward their suggestion for how many new homes the counties of Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and the metropolitan area will need over the next two decades: a whopping 365,000.

This would, in itself, represent the biggest construction programme in the area since the post-war period. Thousands of new homes have been earmarked for rural Shropshire and Herefordshire, two of England's emptiest and least spoilt counties, and vast urban extensions have been proposed for historic towns. For example, 10,500 homes are proposed for Worcester, an ancient city that has suffered more than most at the hands of the planning system. This sort of growth could only be accommodated by a large extension to the existing urban area.



However, it seems Whitehall doesn't think this is enough; and the Department of Communities and Local Government has ripped up the suggested figures "in the light of the government's agenda to increase housebuilding across the country." Instead, it has asked civil servants in the government office for the region to come up with "options that could deliver higher housing numbers".

It seems ministers wants as many as 420,000 new homes in the six counties by 2026 – but have given no hint on how much will be available to fund the new railway lines, schools and hospitals that will be needed if the region is not to be filled with more of the car-dependent, badly-designed sprawl that already characterises much of the urban area.

Allowing developers to cherry-pick prime greenfield sites near desirable towns within easy commuting reach of Birmingham – such as Shrewsbury or Stafford – could also undermine attempts to regenerate parts of the Black Country, still one of the most deprived places in England. Why would a builder bother with a complex scheme on a contaminated site in Dudley, when he could bash out executive homes on a green field near Evesham for twice the profit? After all, he could even brand it as an eco-town.

Councils are demanding a full "sustainability study" but it is unlikely ministers will listen. As of 2010, councils' views will officially be taken into account even less. Throughout England, responsibility for drawing up and managing housing targets will be handed to the regional development agencies, the quangos set up to encourage business growth.

This is part of the government's drive to remove local democracy from the planning system – or rather, as ministers would have it, "make planning more responsive to economic factors". Guidance now issued by Whitehall suggests that making decent, attractive, liveable environments plays second fiddle to "economic objectives".

What looms for the West Midlands shows what will eventually be in store every region. Only a few years ago, it seemed the government was determined to focus economic growth on cities. Now – with the cynical eco-towns programme, the review of the green belt, and the pursuit of housing numbers at any cost – it appears to be preparing for a wave of Noddy boxes that would have shamed even the Thatcher government.

Down on the Farm

FARMING is in such an odd state at the moment it might worry even those urban folk who imagine that food all comes from a factory behind Tesco.

On the one hand, things look pretty rosy. Defra was recently boasting that average farm incomes in 2007 rose by 10 percent, and profits on arable farms are forecast to rise in 2008 by a staggering 38 percent. Hardly surprisingly, it is reported that those true fat cats of our time, the hedge fund managers, are rushing to invest in farmland which is predicted to soar in value.

The chief reason for this is the explosion in world grain and other cereal prices, which have more than doubled in the past year and are still hurtling upwards. This is because, for the first time in decades, the world faces a serious food shortage. The past two years have seen more food consumed than grown. Partly this is because of fast-rising demand from China, only likely to increase after the recent devastation of its food production by the country's heaviest snowfalls in 50 years. But another big boost to cereal prices has been the soaring demand for biofuels to fight global warming. Increasingly vast areas of farmland once used to grow food are being diverted to grow the wheat, oilseed rape and other substitutes for petrol and diesel needed to meet the EU's target of 10 percent of our transport fuel by 2020.

At least all these soaring prices are providing a bonanza for the big arable concerns. But inevitably someone has to pay for it all. Part of the price is already being paid by all of us in rocketing food bills. A far greater price, however, is being paid by all those livestock farmers, particularly the pig and poultry men, for whom their biggest single cost is the grain and other feedstuffs needed to keep their animals alive. While the cereal farmers have been laughing all the way to the bank, our pig farmers are expected this year to make an average loss of £4,000. Poultry farmers have seen their profits cut by more than 90 percent.

So long as Big Brother Tesco and his pals can source their bacon and chickens from countries such as Poland or Thailand, where labour costs are lower, there is no way British producers can raise prices high enough to cover their costs, which is why they are going out of business in droves. The income of lowland livestock farmers is predicted to fall this year by more than a third, to an average £8,700, that of hill farmers by 44 percent, leaving them with just £5,900.

There was a time when, faced with such a crisis, a British government might have stepped in to provide temporary help, but that would be illegal now that the EU sets all the rules. It might even be suggested that the EU itself could help, by allowing livestock farmers to buy some of those legendary grain mountains bought in during the days when lavish subsidies created a huge food surplus. But a year or two back the EU sold off most of those intervention stocks at bargain prices, just when the world was about to face a major food shortage. So the cupboard is bare. Brilliant!

'Muckspreader'

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

IF MPs in the UK are reluctant to reveal details of their expenses, MEPs in Strasbourg and Brussels are even more secretive about their (even more) generous taxpayer-funded allowances.

The European parliament has stalled yet again on an EU Ombudsman request to publish details of the MEPs' allowances – nearly £175,000 a year for each of the 785 members for office and staffing expenses, plus of course travel and subsistence payments which can easily add another £65,000 (making a whopping £188m total annual bill).

The ombudsman asked for a more detailed breakdown following a complaint by *Malta Today* newspaper, which wanted to know if one of the island's MEPs, a former chairman of Air Malta and thus a beneficiary of free travel, was claiming the parliament's "distance allowance". The parliament was supposed to respond by the end of last year (see *Eye* 1197), but secured a two-month extension so it could "study best practice in the member states".

The ombudsman's request comes at a bad time for parliament. Its secretive administrative service – known as the Bureau – is working out how to put in place by 2009 a general review of MEPs' salaries and expenses without rocking the boat too much. There were hopes this would lead to greater transparency but, as one insider said, there has been a "scaling down of ambition". Even a plan to get MEPs to systematically vouch for just half the general expenses they receive has been abandoned in favour of a general undertaking that MEPs' accounts should be available for spot checks.

When the Bureau goes off to study "best practice" in the member states, will it perhaps look into the Derek Conway furore in the UK, given that the "best practice" of employing family members on inflated salaries is no doubt widespread in the European parliament. One example is prominent North-West England Tory MEP Sir Robert Atkins, whose wife Dulcie, as well as being a borough councillor in Lancashire, is also her husband's secretary. In 2004 he paid her a not inconsiderable £5,655 (€8,332) a month, as well as £2,524 (€3,791) to his son, who was then working for him as an assistant.

ALTHOUGH €61bn euros was not properly accounted for in the European Union's 2006 budget, the finance ministers of every member state approved it... bar one.

At the latest meeting of the EU economic and finance ministers in "Ecofin" on 12 February, only Dutch finance minister Wouter Bos expressed his utter shock at the fact that four-fifths of the entire €102bn budget was riddled with errors.

While the court of auditors refused to approve the EU budget (yet again), the EU presidency described it all as "bon procedure". So that's all right then.

EU-phemisms

Up yours Gordon Brown

TV

Lily Allen and Friends (BBC3)

HUMPHRYS and Paxman may regard themselves as the state-of-the-art question-askers but they have nothing on the interrogation techniques of Lily Allen, popette and daughter of the Sheriff of Nottingham, who, disgruntled by an answer given by Cuba Gooding Jr, suddenly growled: "Twat!"

The actor responded with: "Like my mom said, you are what you eat!" to which our hostess sarcastically replied: "Yeah, yeah, I'm sure you've got a massive cock!"

Given that BBC3 is billed as the network that shows the way that TV is going, we look forward to similar exchanges next time Paxo has Hazel Blears on *Newsnight*. But if this really is the future of television, then as WH Auden once said in a different context, stop all the clocks.

Following gloomy research proving that people under 25 spent more time looking at their mobile phones and laptops than the box that their folks had in the corner of the room, **Lily Allen and Friends** is a desperate attempt to make a show that young people who don't watch television might like. The first trick is to book a presenter who has no experience of TV but has made hit songs that the target audience might have downloaded illegally.

Even without unfortunate medical and relationship problems on the eve of recording, Lily Allen was going to struggle to bring off a 40-minute talk-show and, boy, does she struggle. Almost every question to her guests – Gooding and the comedian David Mitchell – was read from large cards, and read at the speed and confidence of a foreigner asked to read aloud in a language class, even though the inquiries were hardly demanding: "*Peep Show* has been described as the sit-com of the decade: do you agree?"

It's possible the reason for this precaution was that the producers had realised during rehearsals that Allen's ad-libs tended towards "Twat!" and "I'm sure you've got a massive cock!"; but it doesn't make for a natural flow of conversation. So uncertain is the hostess that it really wasn't clear if her shtick of asking the guests to read the autocue for her was supposed to be funny or if she really had funked it.

But a presenter who has no connection with TV is at least appropriate for a series which is trying desperately not to be television. The governing principle of *Lily Allen and Friends* is to pretend that it's the internet. The overall conceit is borrowed from Facebook and similar solipsistic communities: the studio audience is selected from viewers who have signed up as a "friend" of Lily on her website. These pseudo-chums then apparently come up with the questions for the guests, send in amusing videos and vote on which of two "hot up and coming Indie bands" gets to do the play-out music.

Until a few months ago, all of this interactivity would be merely a concept – and all the content would have been created by producers, using actors pretending to be members of the public – but the BBC is so obsessed with transparency after the recent scandals that, unfortunately, the programme now really is being created by geeks who want to pretend that they know Lily Allen.

Even by the snake-belly standards of user-generated content, the stuff here is low-level. A guy recalls the embarrassment of having a wet-dream after being forced to share a bed with a male friend on holiday. Then Lily shows some footage from the web of animals copulating and a bear masturbating and appeals: "If you have any footage of animals mating, send it to our website!"

Intermittently Lily reads out statistics drawn from online surveys of her friends. One is that "14 percent of you know a celebrity!" But hang on. If the sample group really are the friends of Lily Allen, then surely they all know a celebrity?

True to both the show's origins and its target audience, the final guest was "You Tube sensation Tay Zonday", a nerdy American who hams his way through a tune called "Chocolate Rain", which has received millions of online hits. Lily falteringly read some questions off her cards and then Tay tried to perform a live studio cover version of her hit "Smile!" but was so frozen by nerves he could barely move his mouth. This catastrophe showed the danger of confusing TV with the internet, which is a more general lesson the series needs to learn.

Tabloid newspaper reports claimed that some of the studio audience walked out because they found the recording so boring and certainly the shots of those watching did seem to reduce as the evening went on. At one point, the presenter resorted to showing off a party-trick: fitting her fist into her mouth. It's amazing there was room, given that her foot was there from the moment she started talking. Inspired by the worldwide web, the programme regrettably makes you think of another three-w sequence: wank wank wank.

'Remote Controller'

- **466,000** = Average late night audience for BBC Three over last year
- **255,000** = Audience for Lily Allen And Friends on night of BBC Three's relaunch

NICK DAVIES appeared to have an attack of amnesia when he appeared at a seminar on "Media Corruption" for BBC hacks last week.

In his book, *Flat Earth News*, Davies insists that the BBC website's goal of publishing breaking news within five minutes meant that journalists were forced to put out inaccurate information for commercial reasons. However, when he was challenged by the website's UK editor Pat Heery who said that it meant nothing of the sort, and that Davies would have discovered as much had he taken up the website's offer (in 2005) of open access to its offices and journalists, he replied: "I thought I did come in..."

When assured by website hacks that they had not had the pleasure, he declared: "Well, lots of [unnamed] people have told me the same thing." When the website's chief sub-editor Rob Liddle asked whether he could "see the irony in pontificating about a fall in journalistic standards while failing to carry out basic research" himself, he dodged the question, accusing Liddle of being "rude".

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Which pop group, who once collaborated on a record with the footballer Paul Gascoigne, took their name from an island off the coast of Northumberland?

Contestant: Gerry and the Pacemakers.

In It To Win It, BBC1

Dale Winton: Alderney and Sark – are they part of the Channel Islands?

Contestant: Ooh! Is that the English Channel? I don't know, are there islands in the English Channel? I've never heard of any. France – that's near the English Channel, isn't it?

LBC radio

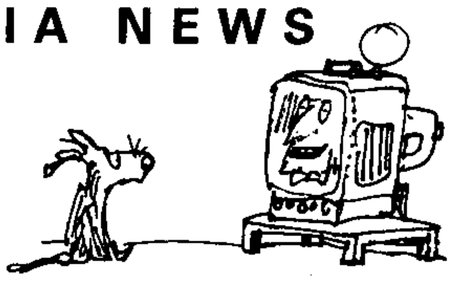
Nick Ferrari: What was the title of the Beatles' fifth album?

Caller: I don't know.

Ferrari: A four-letter word beginning with H.

Caller: A Hard Day's Night.

MEDIA NEWS



LESS than a month after exclusively running the eyewitness account of one Jason Johnson of the Heathrow air craft crash – even though he was nowhere near the area at the time, but rather "a bit pissed and thought it might be quite funny"(see *Eye* 1202) – Sky News had a further exciting revelation courtesy of a viewer – sorry, "citizen journalist" – who claimed to be on the scene of the Camden fire.

"This is the photograph of the night," announced Steve Dixon, as an extraordinarily clear image of three firefighters silhouetted against roaring flames filled the screen. "It really best shows the horror of the scene."

So pleased were producers with the quality of the image, sent in by a viewer identified only as "Joe", that it was recycled a number of times that evening – until someone noticed that the firemen in question were wearing three-quarter length "Bunker Suits" and wide-rimmed, ridged helmets unlike those issued in the UK, and it was quietly dropped.

And the photo? It was taken from the official website of the Nevada State Fire Marshal, based in Carson City, 5,210 miles from Camden Town.

LATER this year, one of the major terrestrial networks will broadcast a special, prime-time investigation into the most common cancer in the UK, which kills around 12,500 women each year.

We know this because production company Maverick recently sent out this tantalising email: "We are writing to tell you about a thrilling TV event that you can be part of. Would you dare to bare your breasts on Channel 4 as part of the UK's biggest breast self-examination?... Our celebrity doctors Christian Jessen, Dawn Harper and Pixie McKenna are on a mission to get Brits talking about their health problems!"

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Hello and welcome to *Afternoon Live*. Our top story: An Archbishop's confession. Dr Rowan Atkinson has admitted his remarks about Sharia law in Britain may have been misleading..."

– Anna Botting, Sky News.

LAST March, ITV received a green light from media regulator Ofcom to reduce the hours of children's programming it broadcast each week on its public-service channel, ITV1, from eight hours to five (it had originally asked for just two).

ITV1 had already ditched its traditional weekday afternoon children's slot in favour of granny-friendly repeats of *Midsomer Murders* and *Inspector* Morse, a strategy that chairman Michael Grade was happy to admit was aimed at the complete extinction of children's programmes from the flagship channel "in the medium to long term".

"ITV continues to invest in the CITV channel, which includes a high volume of UK-produced material and is available to around 90 percent of UK children," a spokesman for the company pointed out.

This month, ITV shifted its channels to a new area on the digital spectrum so that ITV4 would be able to broadcast during the daytime – or, as the company puts it, "more *Minder*, more blockbuster movies and more cult British classics like *The Professionals* and *The Saint*". The move also meant that the CITV channel vanished from TV screens across the whole of Wales, where it is no longer available via Freeview – the system by which 36.6 percent of homes get their digital TV.

"Like all broadcasters, we must make decisions on how best to use the capacity available to us," the company announced in response to complaints. "ITV's public-service commitments apply only to ITV1 and therefore the programming on our dedicated children's channel is in addition to the required number of children's programming hours."

"Hi, I'm looking for some 'Northern Soul'. Is it this way?"

"Noooo... not that way. That way lies madness!!!"

HATS off to the *Today* programme and to hack Angus Stickler, who appears to have had a couple of "scoops" of late concerning mayor of London Ken Livingstone.

Alas, the source of Stickler's stories is none other than former *Today* colleague turned *Standard* hack, *persona non grata* Andrew Gilligan!

It was Gilligan of course who had to resign in January 2004 in the furore over the Hutton Report. Time for the BBC to bring him back?

LUVVIES

'First day, I said, "Listen Joe, just don't fuck with me and we'll be OK." But the whole point is that we're supposed to fuck with each other and he did fuck with me – for some reason he got under my skin and fuck, it worked. And the truth is we're doing a movie about getting under people's skin, into their heads and about having faith, man.'

ROBERT DOWNEY Jnr on director JOE WRIGHT,
The Observer

Submitted by Jamie Blomfield.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

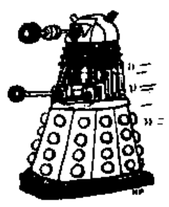
UKTV GOLD'S recent survey of "fictional characters the British public thinks are real" prompted collective chortles in newspapers here and overseas, with hacks lining up to jeer at our supposedly dim youth.

But hold on: who is this at No 5 in the list? Dick Turpin (1706-1739), the genuine events of whose life were documented at some length in James Sharpe's excellent 2004 biography *Dick Turpin: The Myth of the English Highwayman.* And at No 8? Lady Godiva, whose existence as wife of Leofric, Earl of Mercia, is recorded in the Domesday Book as well as in the records of benefactions to monasteries in the 11th century.

Meanwhile, rather less historical evidence exists concerning Boudicca, who, UKTV Gold gleefully tells us, 5 percent of dunderheaded teens think was a myth.

Still, at least the long-running speculation over whether Nennius and Geoffrey of Monmouth were making it up as they went along, and whether Lisa Gherardini or another woman sat as model for Leonardo da Vinci, can finally be put to bed: King Arthur and Mona Lisa come in at No 1 and No 4 respectively on UKTV Gold's definitive list of fictional characters, so anyone who thinks otherwise must be stupid.

BIRTSPEAK 2.0



"The graphics and 'look and feel' reflect the way news has become more 24/7 and multi-platform. It has to work on TV, mobiles, blogs, iPods – even YouTube. TV news has to acquiesce to the old values of hierarchical information and strong editing. Squaring these demands is the current challenge for designers."

– James Bell of "Corporate Identity Design Agency" Moving Brands on the News at Ten *relaunch,* Design Week

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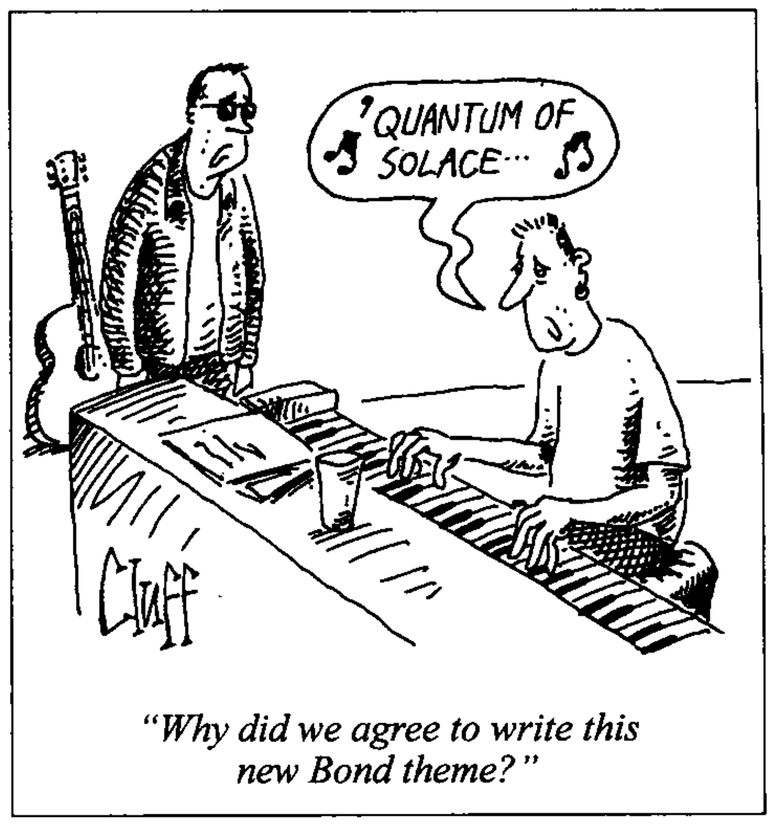
LEGAL NEWS

LAST November a committee of five very senior judges headed by Lord Justice May released a report that, among other things, examined how there could be more sittings outside London of the court of appeal, which is staffed by some of the most important judges in the land.

The report noted that there were a lot of problems, mainly administrative, in arranging these sittings. It would of course be quite wrong to suppose that the prospect of spending a week or two in places such as Birmingham or Preston did not appeal to their lordships.

But to see how easily it can be done, they should pick the brains of their fellow (also very senior) judges who sit on the privy council, hearing appeals from the courts of Commonwealth countries.

Until recently they had never sat outside London; but in December, for the second winter in a row, they managed to travel all the way to the Bahamas for a series of hearings, no doubt involving a good deal of strenuous work in its agreeable climate.



"Why did we agree to write this new Bond theme?"

AD NAUSEAM

GOVERNMENT intelligence is an area where sensitivity is vital. How heartening, then, to see that government intelligence recruitment is being manned by dunderheads.

A recent GCHQ recruitment ad campaign has been using the headline "WWI WWII WWW" in a bid to stress that, as they put it, "Online is the new front-line."

If that's merely ham-fisted, conflating real wars in which millions died with imaginary wars in which millions haven't, then the body copy of the ad beggars belief: "WWI, The Somme, Paschendale, 40m casualties. WWII, Belsen, Dunkirk, 50m dead. Today, another global war threatens our freedom… Online is the new front-line. www.careersinbritishintelligence.co.uk." And if you don't join up, kids, the bogeyman in the keffiyeh will come and get you.

The ads were created by agency TMP Worldwide, which has also taken to embedding GCHQ ads in first-person shoot-'em-up video games in case anyone didn't get the message that we are at war. Indeed, with the intelligence services exhibiting this kind of measured diplomacy, WWIII can't be far away.

A NEW burst of posters and press for the Suzuki Swift hatchback has the ring of familiarity about it.

A product of the Tunbridge Wells agency Nexus H, the ads depict a series of embarrassing or unfortunate situations, including the tired old clichés of being wedged under someone's armpit on the Underground, the horror of two girls wearing the same outfit, and the best man forgetting the wedding ring. The strap-line is "Time for a Swift Exit".

Nexus H must be hoping its client doesn't remember a campaign for Harp lager in the 80s and early 90s. This also featured people stuck in embarrassing or unfortunate situations and used the line "Time for a Sharp Exit".

Come the next meeting with the client, Nexus H management may also be exiting post-haste.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

MEDICINE BALLS

Letter of the Week

Sir,

I received Alan Johnson's letter today "Improving access to GP services", and having just seen my last patient, read it and thought I'd give him a call. His phone number is on the letter.

I spoke to a very nice chap and explained that having received Mr Johnson's letter there were a couple of things I'd like to discuss with him, he asked me to hold and then came back on the line to say that Mr Johnson wasn't available, and in fact there was no one at all at the DoH who could discuss this letter with me, as there is no one in the offices after 5pm.

I'm delighted that at least everyone at the DoH finishes early enough to be able to see their own GP in a normal evening surgery without the need for extended opening hours.

PAUL BAIRD,
Portesham Surgery,
Weymouth.

THE big fuss over extending GPs' hours has ended with Health Secretary Alan Johnson looking tough and the BMA looking foolish (again); but the UK's "strongest trade union" is anything but given that GPs will never go on strike and precious few would abandon their NHS income and final salary pension scheme for the vicissitudes of private practice and the stock market.

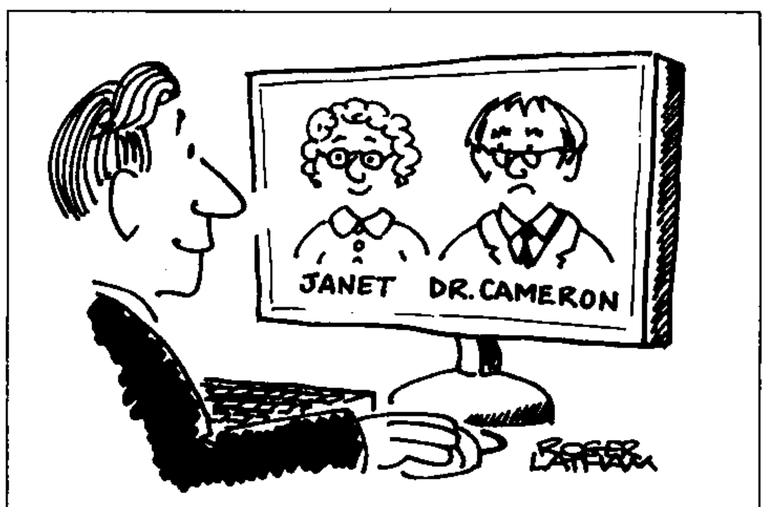
Given the over supply of doctors (6,000 new graduates each year but only 3,000 retiring), the DoH knows there is plenty of young blood desperate for work (MD's practice had 70 applicants for a maternity locum). Alas, the proposed extension of hours is unlikely to be matched by an extension of pathology and X ray services, so most practices will just run a few nurse-led minor illness clinics to mop up the commuters suffering First Great Western stress.

A bigger problem for Johnson (and patients) will be the longer term damage caused by doctors' lack of engagement in his reforms. Hospitals had first shout at the "constructive discomfort" of private competition to make them raise their game. Waiting lists came down and many of the independent sector treatment centre (ISTC) projects (having made a quick killing at the expense of the taxpayer) are now struggling for work, with new wave projects abandoned. The private sector sees general practice as a far more lucrative market – there are 12m chronically sick patients out there likely to remain that way for life – but whether a UnitedHealth polyclinic can provide the same service and value as traditional general practice remains to be seen.

Doctors are competitive by nature and most will rise to the challenge, but the likelihood of their succeeding is reduced by the unfair advantages ("incentives to enter the market") offered to the private sector. When even Lord Darzi's GP adviser, Sam Everington, loses out to Atos Health in a bid to extend GP services in east London, most GPs will feel they haven't got a chance of beating the multinationals.

As for hospitals, foundation trusts are now free from Department of Health control and likely to concentrate on treatments that make money, rather than provide a comprehensive service for all patients. Unison has launched a judicial review against Monitor (the foundation trust regulator) which currently allows the trusts to avoid a cap on private patient income by setting up a separate company to provide treatment. So NHS hospitals are taking on private competition by privatising themselves. Such an aggressive, market based system works beautifully in America.

M.D.



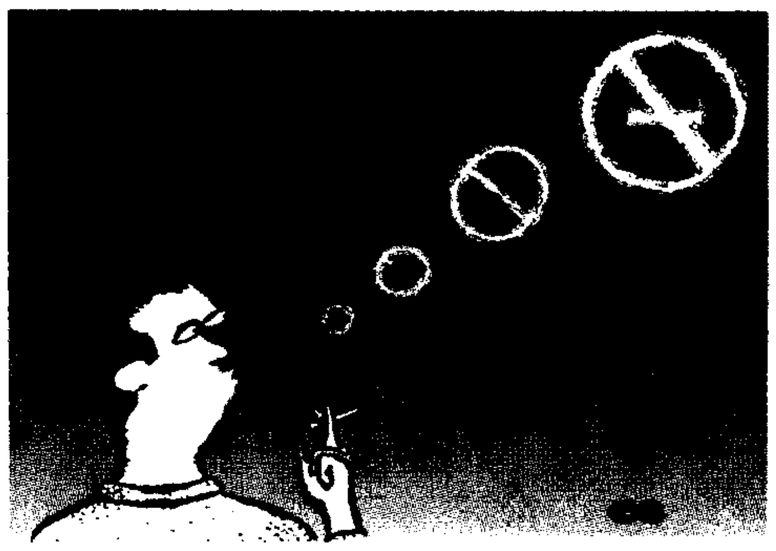
Dr Finlay's Facebook

LORDS A-CASHING IN

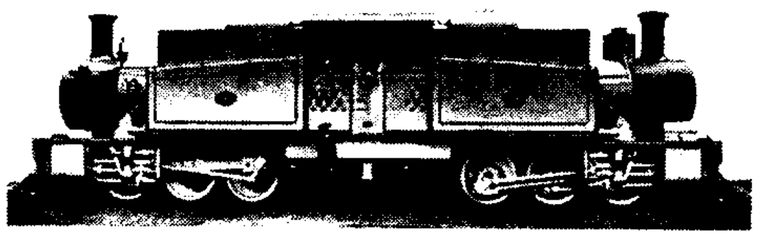
BUSY-BEE former health minister Lord Warner (see last *Eye*) has found yet another private health job: the chairmanship of UK HealthGateway Ltd. It promises to provide foreign private health companies with "the No. 1 route to the UK health market" and to "introduce you to key influencers and opinion formers".

So far Warner has kept his prodigious cashing-in out of the spotlight. But for how much longer? He appears to have broken parliamentary rules by failing to declare his many interests during a debate last November in which he strongly endorsed government health policy. Speaking on 8 November Warner declared: "If we are to have the personalised healthcare system that the prime minister rightly wants, choice and competition with a mixed economy of providers, in an open and fairly regulated market, are critical to success."

What he didn't declare was that he had recently been cleared by the advisory committee on business appointments to take jobs with private hospital owner Apax Partners and private health consultant Deloitte, big beneficiaries of his preferred "mixed economy of providers". He also spoke up for a health and social care bill that has hospital cleaning as a key element, without mentioning the all-clear he had to work for cleaning product supplier Byotrol. Warner surely won't mind if the Lords privileges committee looks at the matter, keen as he is on untainted debate. Anticipating objections to government policy from medics in the very same speech, Warner urged "noble Lords to use their well honed powers of scepticism and capacity for detecting the whiff of self-interest in considering these aspects of the bill" – apparently oblivious to the stench emanating from himself.



SIGNAL FAILURES



LONDON mayor Ken Livingstone's normally hyperactive press machine was strangely silent on 6 February when the government slipped out that it would be taking a £2bn hit on the debts and future costs of Metronet, the failed Underground PPP company.

Transport for London did publish a bit of information on the story – tucked into the ninth paragraph of a press release about the capital's long-term transport funding and the Olympics. So why the silence?

One would have expected Livingstone to have trumpeted this news with all the fervour that he defends his dodgy race adviser, Lee Jasper. After all, Livingstone rightly opposed the PPP from the start, arguing that it was an expensive fiasco and laid the blame at the door of Gordon Brown. A bit of "I told you so" would not have gone amiss.

However, the deal Livingstone has obtained from Brown is remarkably generous given that the government is guaranteeing all the debts incurred by Metronet and making all taxpayers, not just those in London, foot the bill. But Livingstone is hardly going to bite the hand that feeds him, whatever the history between the two.

That suits Brown who was responsible for the PPP and the £500m it cost to set up when he was chancellor. In a rational world, there would be demands for his resignation; but while poor Peter Hain gets stuffed over the non-declaration of £100,000 with no question of public funds being lost, Brown gets away with wasting at least £2.5bn with lots more to come.

Indeed, only the taxpayer has suffered as a result of this enormous scandal. Brown quietly moved next door while the transport secretary who signed off the deals, Stephen Byers, now lives in happy obscurity on the backbenches. PriceWaterhouseCoopers, the consultancy that pushed through the idea, is now being paid to find solutions to unravel it; while Brown's special adviser who negotiated through the contracts, Shriti Vadera, is a minister and Denis Tunnicliffe, the London Underground boss at the time, sits in the Lords.

"WE CHECK all regulated fares to make sure increases do not exceed the limit," say the bureaucrats at the transport department. Yeah, right.

Last month First Great Western was forced by watchdog London TravelWatch (ie *not* the transport department) into a u-turn on illegal fare rises. The maximum permitted rise on season tickets (regulated fares) was 4.8 percent, but FGW slapped double that rise on commuters from Slough, Maidenhead and other stations.

As the government obviously doesn't ensure that regulated fares stay within the "limit", London TravelWatch suspected other companies also overcharged and demanded a system of independent auditing. Fat chance, when the government has decreed that ticket revenue will rise 80 percent over seven years.

Of course there's no limit on rises in unregulated tickets. Since Virgin became the sole London-Manchester train operator in 1997, for example, a return for travel any time has risen 142 percent on standard class and 167 percent first class. But there's no limit on profits. Richard Branson pocketed £24m from Virgin Rail last year.

THE East Midlands Trains (EMT) franchise is already showing how little the government has learned from 12 years of rail franchising.

Three months after Stagecoach took over, passengers are fed up with short trains and overcrowding, especially on the Liverpool-Manchester-Sheffield-Norwich route. EMT promises 10 percent more capacity – but only by rearranging seats in existing trains. (Cramming more passengers into the same space was perfected by Stagecoach's South West Trains: see *Eye* 1169.)

Last month the government announced where 1,300 extra carriages will be deployed around England by 2014; and the sprawling EMT franchise will get precisely, er, three more carriages. Stagecoach makes a meagre £180m annual profit, and mustered only a £700m windfall for shareholders last year. So it's up to "stakeholders" (publicly funded authorities) to fund extra carriages.

'Dr B. Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

ARE YOU BEING SERVED?

TAKING the principle of "partnership" between Birmingham city council (BCC) and Crapita to heart are council chief executive Stephen Hughes and Crapita executive Debra Lee.

Both are directors of "Service Birmingham" (SB), the joint venture company set up by the council and Crapita to carry out the £600m-plus "transformation" of Brum which has so far had such inspiring results (*see* last *Eye*).

Hughes's and Lee's explorations of the Ugandan dimension of the "transformational agenda" have been so intense that colleagues have dubbed Hughes's flat in SB's city centre HQ "the love shack". Sweet!

Also looking sweet are Lee's share options in Crapita Group plc. According to SB's most recently filed accounts, up to the end of 2006, Ms Lee was awarded 115,000 share options in that year. She exercised 25,000, which left her with 90,000 in December 2006. With Capita's shares at around 650p, they would currently be worth more than £580,000 – plenty of incentive for the "partnership" to be successful. And, of course, no conflict of interest whatsoever for the taxpayer-funded Mr Hughes.

PS: While, er, getting into bed with big business seems no problem for senior executives in Brum, it's a different story for the lower orders. Last year a female BCC middle manager seconded to Service Birmingham became pregnant after having Ugandan discussions with a consultant from Axon, one of the firms "advising" Brum on its "transformation". The Axon man was sacked.

● MEANWHILE, in a scene described as "like a TV cop drama", a Brum council van driver was blocked in at traffic lights by a recovery truck earlier this month. A man then wrenched opened the driver's door, grabbed the keys and ordered him to get out. Fearing he was being "car-jacked", the terrified driver did as he was told. At this point the "robbers" identified themselves as bailiffs repossessing the van on behalf of a leasing company which had not been paid by the council, thanks to Crapita's new "transformational" IT system, Voyager (*Eye* 1203). The bailiffs were going to leave the driver and his cargo of confidential documents for the children and families department at the roadside. But when they saw his distress they took him back to the office. Much misunderstood, bailiffs.

CHELSEA PENSIONER

THOUSANDS of council workers in Leeds, as elsewhere, face pay cuts of up to £6,000 a year as a national exercise in "job evaluation" gets under way. This has caused much unhappiness, with many, already on low wages, fearing they may be unable to pay their mortgages and facing the prospect of reduced pensions.

No such worries, happily, for one Leeds employee who took early retirement last year: the city's former chief recreation officer, Denise Preston. One of Mrs Preston's more agreeable roles was to design the city's annual entry for the Chelsea Flower Show – Leeds being the only council to exhibit there. Despite her retirement, Mrs P will continue to go to the show, as she has been hired by the city council as its Chelsea garden "consultant" at the modest rate of £60 an hour, for 250 hours. This will net her £15,000 – more than many manual workers will be earning in a year once Leeds council has cut their wages.

RAE OF HOPELESS

11 January: Hammersmith & Fulham Homes (the "arms-length management organisation" which runs Tory H&F council's former properties) is delighted to report it has attained "Investors In People" status. IIP's inspector reports that he found a "lot of good people management". There is "strong and committed leadership from a chief executive [Billy Rae] who is respected for his knowledge and understanding of the sector and who is visible to his staff". Hurrah!

14 January: H&F Homes writes to 130 caretakers and sheltered housing managers, telling them they are losing their tied accommodation and having their pay cut by around 50 percent prior to being "outsourced". Good managers sometimes have to make tough decisions, don't they?

18 January: Rae admits H&F Homes has received only one star for its performance from the Audit Commission with "no immediate prospects for improvement". The only parts of the service earning praise are, er, the caretakers and sheltered housing managers, downgraded a week previously. Hmmm.

24 January: Rae is fired. A fortnight's a long time in the wacky world of housing!

ROCK AND HARD PLACE

OLD ways die hard in Northern Ireland. When Francis Rock became chief executive of Craigavon borough council in Co Armagh he declared it was time for change at an authority where jobs and contracts seemed to head mostly in the direction of Protestant members of the community.

In response he received an anonymous letter warning him to "stop bullying and harassing" senior staff, accompanied by… a bullet. The handwritten letter demanded he "immediately rescind all recent changes" and added "we are watching you, your wife and your two beautiful adopted children… Do not go to the police. This is your only warning."

Control of the council lies with the Ulster Unionist party (UUP). The opposition Social Democratic and Labour party claims some services are never tendered for, but simply handed out to the council's "friends". But the majority of councillors

"Excellent! So that's passed then. All we need do now is draft the consultation document"

and senior staff don't see it that way. Since Rock's arrival three senior officers have lodged grievances and others are on sick leave.

Last November, after Rock criticised former mayor Kenneth Twyble and other councillors for not holding an inquiry into the bullet incident, Twyble said his decision was based on legal advice because there was a "live" accusation of harassment against the chief executive. Catch 22! Now the Northern Ireland equality commission is to investigate whether employment and procurement practices at the council meet equality guidelines. The ruling UUP says there is nothing to hide. Indeed – the way things are seems clear for all to see.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"When he turned round and saw me he offered me a cup of tea and a slice of cake." – witness tells employment tribunal what happened when he discovered a senior Aberdeen city council officer discussing Uganda with a female colleague in the office.

"It's not a type of swimming pool that you go swimming in – it's a water park." – Swansea's Lib Dem council leader Chris Holley answers critics who complain that the city's new £32m leisure centre will not be open to swimmers until after 4pm on weekdays unless they sign up for other expensive activities.

"I *am* the fucking police." – Newham parks "constable", allegedly drunk in hospital casualty department, to nurses when they threatened to call police. Duly arrested by Knacker, he has been added to the Keystones' growing list of suspendees.

YOB CULTURE

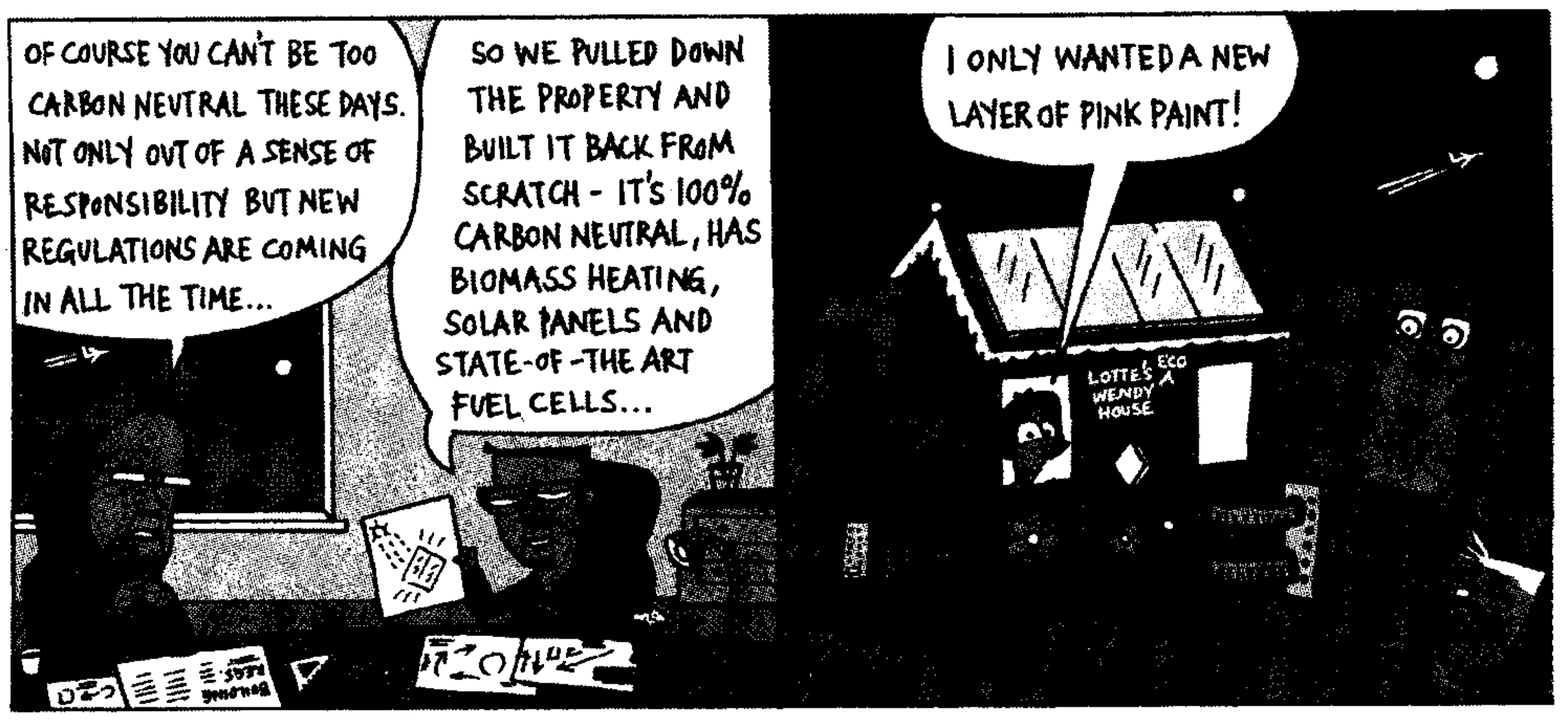
LIKE an Asbo for a hoodie, being banned from holding public office and getting kicked out of your party seems to be a badge of honour for Peterborough's ruling Tories.

They have recommended disgraced former council leader Neville "Fuck the Irish" Sanders (*Eyes passim*) to receive the freedom of the city. Sanders' downfall came in 2003 after Unionist-controlled Carrickfergus borough council in Ulster wrote to every council leader in the UK asking them to support calls for an inquiry into the suicide of a teenage soldier from the town who claimed he'd been bullied at his barracks.

Missing the point entirely, Sanders ranted against "lazy Irish bastards" and claimed the dead soldier's family owed *him* an apology because of the Troubles [eh?].

In 1992 the *Eye* dubbed Sanders "Britain's looniest councillor" after he accused a pensioner who invited him to address an oldies' group of being a "wicked woman… exploiting pensioners for socialist purposes" (*Eye* 809). In later years he claimed *Big Issue* sellers were all work-shy drug addicts; members of Friends of the Earth were compared to Nazis. Sanders' finest hour came in 2004, when he was runner-up in the Tory Bigot of the Year category of the *Eye*'s Rotten Boroughs awards. Sufficient honour, surely, for a man of Mr Sanders' stature.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

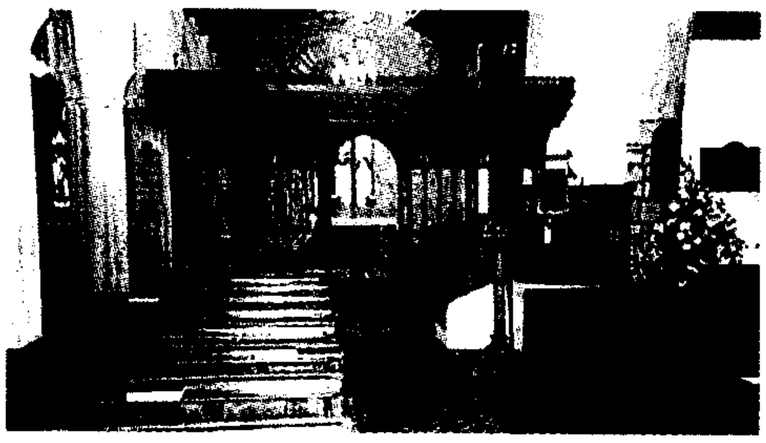

OF COURSE YOU CAN'T BE TOO CARBON NEUTRAL THESE DAYS. NOT ONLY OUT OF A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY BUT NEW REGULATIONS ARE COMING IN ALL THE TIME...
SO WE PULLED DOWN THE PROPERTY AND BUILT IT BACK FROM SCRATCH - IT'S 100% CARBON NEUTRAL, HAS BIOMASS HEATING, SOLAR PANELS AND STATE-OF-THE ART FUEL CELLS...
I ONLY WANTED A NEW LAYER OF PINK PAINT!
LOTTE'S ECO WENDY HOUSE

NOOKS and CORNERS

DR SIR Roy Strong has suggested the way to solve the problem of looking after England's many, many village churches is to return them to the community and adapt them. "It's unreal for many of these churches to continue," the former director of the Victoria 'n' Albert Museum has pronounced. "They have these so-called untouchable brown wooden pews. But why not rip them out and burn them?"

What, I wonder, would Sir Roy do with St Budock Church in Cornwall, where it is the vicar who wants to rip things out while the locals wish to keep the interior as it is and long has been? St Budock is the mother church of Falmouth and has particular charm in a county full of lovely old churches.

Part of its appeal is that it is not filled with the Victorian benches Sir Roy and so many forward-looking incumbents so hate. In fact, there has been little change to the interior for more than a century and a half. "The church has a fifteenth-century granite tower," wrote the Blessed Betjeman, founder of this column. "Inside... it possesses more pre-Victorian features than most Cornish churches – low box pews with doors, a cut-down fifteenth century screen, a Killigrew brass and Killigrew monuments." And Pevsner also liked the pews: "The church has BOX PEWS, in the Georgian tradition, now all too rare."



Two years ago the vicar of Budock, the Rev Geoffrey Bennett, decided this precious interior needed reordering. His plan is to remove the box pews from the north aisle and to have a central altar in the chancel, which will partly cover the 1567 brass of the Killigrew family (who developed Falmouth in the 16th century) and requires the removal of the (Victorian) choir stalls. At present, argues Mr Bennett, the chancel "is very congested for people of a certain age". What can this mean? Are modern clergy and their acolytes so obese they cannot squeeze past the altar as earlier generations managed to do? Anyway, his proposals met with strong local opposition, although the parish church council (PCC) did as it was told.

St Budock Church is listed grade II*, but what really matters with a church in use is the Church of England's own system for monitoring alterations. In this case, the proposals were supported by the diocesan advisory committee – but these days DACs tend to be packed with amenable souls who will not rock the boat. The plan then went to the chancellor of the diocese, who decided to give the PCC time to make amendments before making a decision.

The proposals have now been revived for "prayerful consideration" by the congregation, and are as destructive and inappropriate as before. Mr Bennett simply dismisses objections as they mostly come from people who are not members of the congregation. "The church family bear the brunt of the cost. The people who object don't come to the church and don't pay for the work," he complains. But unless or until the dear old C of E declines into a mere sect, it remains the national, established church and its buildings *belong to us all*. Besides, work to the church has already been carried out with public money – a generous English Heritage grant towards conserving the medieval painted panels on the rood screen.

"This ancient church," wrote one aggrieved parishioner to the local paper, the *Falmouth Packet*, "has been a symbol, a refuge and more for many centuries, a place for dignified worship, both for regular attenders and those whose personal need may be sporadic throughout their lives." I could not put it better myself. As for Mr Bennett, he should "remember that he is the present brief, very brief, custodian for future generations. They will not thank him for vandalising its lovely interior."

Churches are not just structures which might accommodate alternative uses – whether as a dance hall, theatre or post office as Sir Roy recommends. As well as places of worship, they are repositories of art and craftsmanship, full of objects which deserve a better fate than being burned or chopped up to make cupboards for coffee cups.

MORE on Fairview New Homes, which in 2006 succeeded in demolishing Cumberlow Lodge in South Norwood (Eye 1175) to the fury of locals and of Croydon council. This occurred just before English Heritage was due to visit the site to see if the house was listable.

Back in 2002 Fairview Homes demolished the Plough public house in Enfield just before an English Heritage officer was due to assess it for listing. And now the company has done it again.

In 2003 Fairview bought the old Queen's Hospital in Thornton Heath, where the original building of 1865-66, the old Croydon Union Workhouse, was listed grade II. Oddly enough, before Fairview won planning permission to convert the buildings and build some 360 flats – indeed, on the very day the sale was completed – the listed buildings were seriously damaged in a fire that was reported as arson.

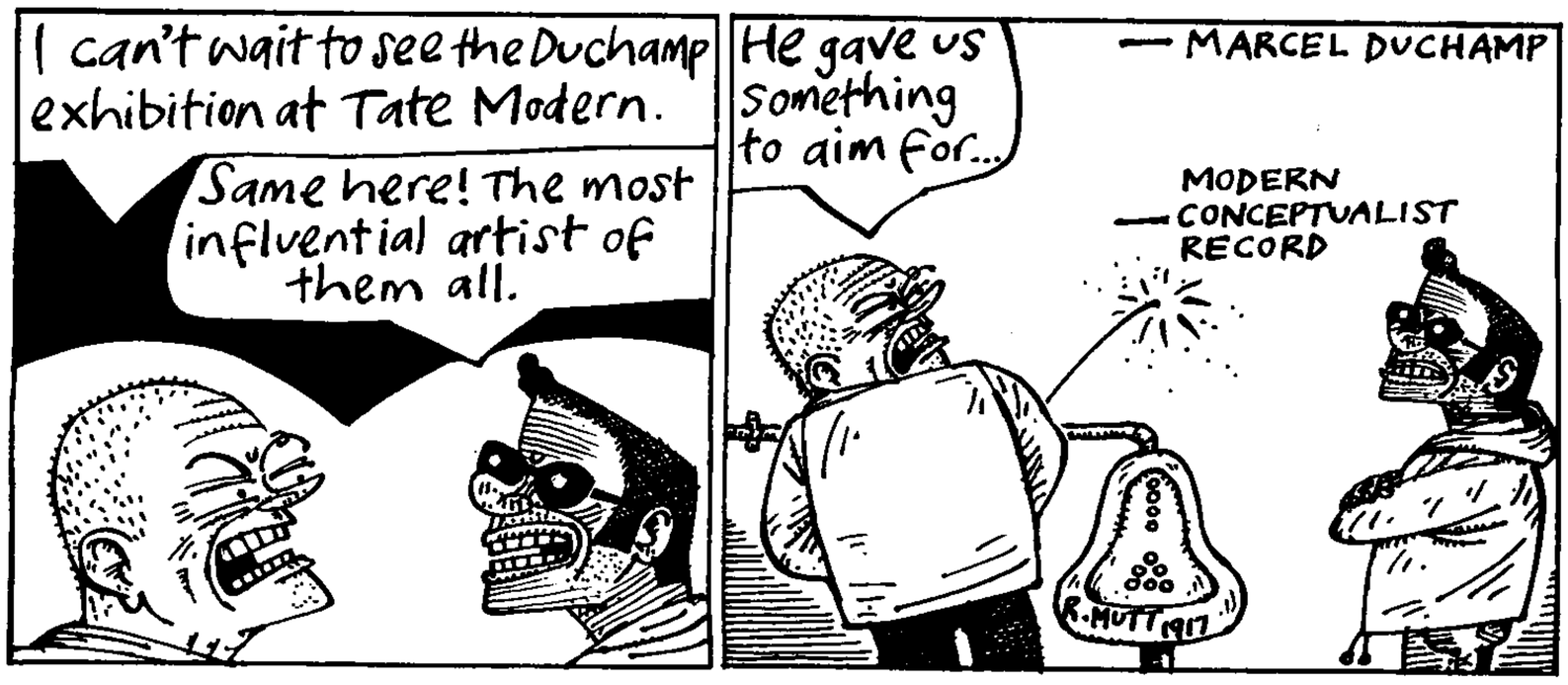
Croydon council required that the Workhouse was to be retained but, last month, with most of the development completed, Fairview demolished roughly 40 percent of the listed building – the southern wings and the tower – before Croydon council intervened.

Demolishing a listed building is a criminal offence. Fairview Homes should be prosecuted.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


I can't wait to see the Duchamp exhibition at Tate Modern.
Same here! The most influential artist of them all.
He gave us something to aim for...
— MARCEL DUCHAMP
— MODERN CONCEPTUALIST RECORD
R. MUTT 1917

I-SPY

Cheadle

Submitted by John Campbell.

£10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

"She drives away the gangs of teenagers"

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

IT'S official, Britain is a cultured nation: blessed not only with the miracle of Liverpool 08 (let joy be uncontained and hearts uplifted) but the promise of five hours a week of cultural instruction for each child in every school (flags wave, spontaneous delirium, etc).

But what sort of culture are we talking about in musical terms? The Performing Right Society is offering a £50,000 prize in its New Music Awards, and the shortlist includes standardly right-on stuff such as an Afro-Caribbean operetta and some sort of orchestral work featuring a "human beatbox artist" by the name of Shlomo.

But what stand out are: a piece constructed from the neuron-firings of an artificial brain, disseminated to 24 locations throughout the UK (including a motorway crash barrier and an offshore buoy) with a performing duration of three months; a computer-processed soundscape of bat noises that plays continuously for four months; and a piece for bicycle that will be "peddled" across Britain for a year.

Given their über-Wagnerian playing times, you could perhaps say that what these candidates have in common is value for money. No mere 20-minute string quartet or song cycle (not for cycles) could possibly compete.

But what they also have in common is that they're complete tosh: vacuous, sensationalist tosh in much the way of last year's winner of the PRS prize, which was a piece for noises emitted from a hole in the ground. Since the composer of *Score for a Hole in the Ground* is one of the judges this time round, it isn't hard to see how they got shortlisted.

In the unlikely event that none of them manages to win, their authors shouldn't have too hard a job finding alternative handouts. A composer/academic at Oxford Brookes University has just been handed £40,000 for the next stage of an ongoing project that involves people screaming songs against the roar of the traffic at Vauxhall Cross roundabout in south London. Entitled *Vauxhall Pleasure (2)*, it will, according to the funding designation, "investigate the ephemeral and oneiric qualities of live performance and interrogate the relationship between political protest and entertainment, traffic and pedestrians, pollution, breathing and song via two practice-based outputs".

Sounding expensive, but no doubt worth every penny, it should give pause for thought to those ensembles such as the London Mozart Players and City of London Sinfonia, who lost their Arts Council grants in the last bout of cuts. Considered study of the subtleties of *Vauxhall Pleasure (2)* might show them where they're going wrong.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

All-seeing Eye

Sir,

May I congratulate you on yet another Eye scoop. I refer, of course, to the following entry to the Police Log, p.20, Eye 1203, published before *the Archbishop of Canterbury's recent controversial speech: "Station to close. Ansaphone recommends public seek advice and help on criminal or judicial matters from Neasden Sharia Court, 712 Poundstretcher Road."*

Regards,
CATHERINE THOMAS,

Via email.

Receipt deceit?

Sir,

Re Newsnight and the Mosques (Eye 1203). "Ratbiter" doesn't appear to have watched the Newsnight film which examined Policy Exchange's report The Hijacking of British Islam. The film itself showed that one of the extreme books was on sale at the Muslim Education Centre in High Wycombe.

Newsnight raised serious questions about the authenticity of receipts from six Mosques and Islamic Centres used to support Policy Exchange's findings. Policy Exchange promised to investigate these discrepancies, but two months later they have still not said if they believe the receipts are genuine.

"Ratbiter" also ignores the fact that Newsnight has been at the forefront of investigating radical Islam in Britain.

PETER BARRON,

Editor, Newsnight.

Having a Flynn?

Sir,

Is the Paul Flynn, MP for Newport, who so fulsomely congratulated Peter Hain on his "eighth successive year of distinguished service as Secretary of State for Wales" the same Paul Flynn, MP for Newport, who in his 1999 book, Dragons Led By Poodles, *described him as having "been compared with Odo, Star Trek's shape-shifter who liquifies at the end of each day and sleeps in a bucket then later he emerges in any shape he wishes"? Apparently, Hain had "the capacity of being on all sides – simultaneously". Somewhat mysteriously Flynn referred to him at that time as having succeeded to the Welsh Office "without a shudder of guilt". Not how he left it, eh!*

Yours,
JOHN NEWSINGER,

Via email.

Plane sailing

Sir,

Sadly, there are no humorous sides to the government's blatant preference for air travel over railways (Dr B Ching, Eye 1202).

But what your piece didn't add is that the public consultation on the Heathrow Expansion proposals (third runway plus yet another shopping terminal) is now current.

Readers have until Feb 28th to access the documents and the consultation form on the Department for Transport's web site (Adding Capacity at Heathrow on www.dft.gov.uk).

Please object now.

JAMES BRANDER,

Beaconsfield.

Cairns terrier

Sir,

Re Wing Commander Mike Cairns (Eye 1202 and passim).

As a Territorial Army Officer who has just returned from Afghanistan, I particularly chuckled at the hypocrisy of the Eye in regards to Mike Cairns.

You stated that "outraged politicians in Northern Ireland" were waiting to hear if the BBC would discipline Mike Cairns for a "conflict of interest" in being a Reservist media trainer for the MOD whilst being employed by the BBC News in Northern Ireland! As a result the Eye quotes Paul Maskey, a Northern Ireland Assembly member stating that Mr Cairns's job was "untenable".

Could this "outraged" member be none other than the same Paul Maskey of Sinn Fein (which you omitted to write) and the brother of Alex Maskey, a notorious IRA terrorist and another member of the Assembly. Surely not... So, no conflict of interest where the Maskeys are concerned when they have advocated terrorism to overthrow the British Government whilst being paid by the Crown.

It is a shame the Eye has not supported Mr Cairns, who at least is serving his country whilst the likes of Maskey protest outrage!

I suppose it's trebles all round at the Eye's sister paper An Phoblacht.

Yours,
MILAN TORBICA,

Via email.

Lookalike

Wilkinson

Squirrel

Sir,

An uncanny resemblance, don't you think?

Yours,
J. STEWART,

Glos.

Bum notes

Sir,

Unfortunately, my letter (entitled 'Parry match') printed at the bottom of the left-hand column of page 13 of the latest Eye (1203) has the vital word 'English' omitted before the words 'National Opera'.

Yours faithfully,
ANTHONY G. PACKMAN,

Via email.

Sir,

Re: the letter questioning "Lunchtime O'Boulez's negative reaction to several recent National Opera productions" in Eye 1203 (see above). We are neither "prissy" nor "weird" but sitting through ENO's recent Coronation of Poppea *was probably the most boring evening of our lives. How they managed to make vice in Ancient Rome so banal is just mystifying.*

Saying that though, we really think they should have given the remote-controlled squid a curtain call.

Keep up the good work!

ROB & LAURA,

Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See

"Can't get rid of it? I had a really stinking cold that went in a couple of days.""

Must do better

Sir,

I was disappointed to see the Eye join in with the insinuations about Henry Conway's sexuality (cover, Eye 1203). Either it's relevant to the scandal over his father's parliamentary expenses, in which case talk about it and be protected by the public interest defence, or it's irrelevant, in which case don't copy other media outlets' childish hints that he might be gay. I've heard no similarly dark mutterings that he might be left-handed, which would prima facie be about as relevant to the scandal as his sexual preferences.

I won't be cancelling my subscription because the Eye is much more interesting than Attitude or Boyz (hint, hint), but do please keep your eye on what's relevant and what's just gossip. You can do better, and frequently do.

With kind regards,
DR TOM DOLPHIN,

London.

Conway & Sons

Sir,

In issue 1203 you show a picture – on both the cover and p. 6 – of members of the Conway family. An almost identical image appeared on p. 6 of the Weekly Telegraph (issue 863). The differences were that the Conways' daughter was included in the latter along with a Christmas greeting endorsement.

As I live abroad, I don't know which version appeared in other British papers, but I strongly suspect that it was the Weekly Telegraph version. Have you been guilty of manipulating the evidence by digitally doctoring the photograph concerned? If so, I think we should be told.

Sceptically yours,
J.A. BOSWORTH,

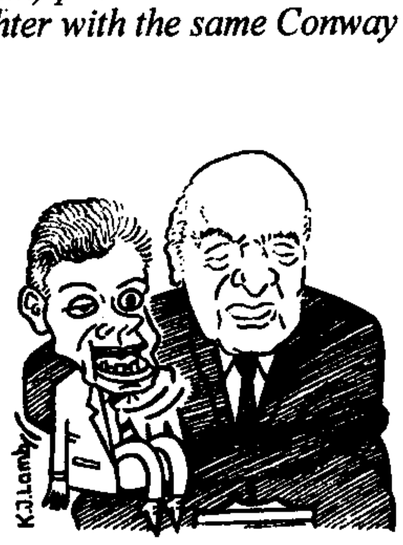
Cugy (FR), Switzerland.

●*The altered (Daily Mail) photo was chosen to avoid tarring the daughter with the same Conway brush. Ed.*

Anagram

Sir,

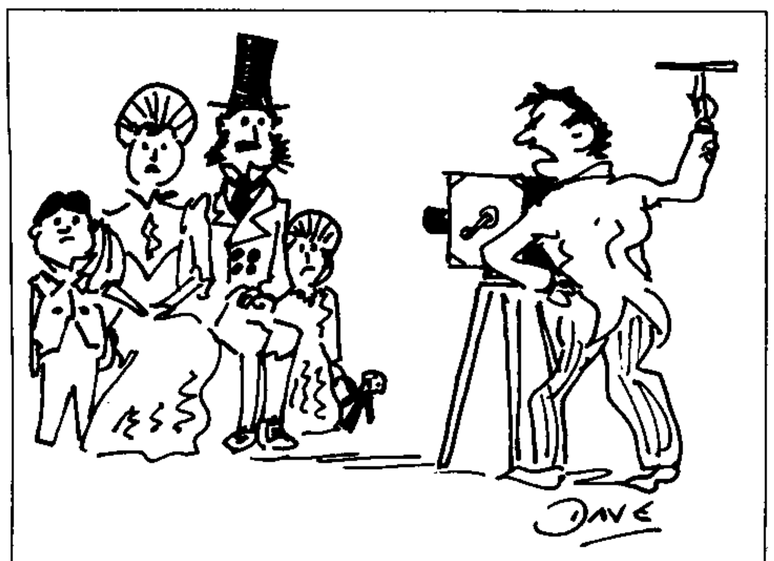
This anagram might be a bit late for Cole's latest statement, but it might be useful the next time MF sits him on his lap with his hand up his back.



MICHAEL COLE = CALL ME – I ECHO...

Sincerely,
TIM HOPKINS,

Luton, Beds.



"Oi! Are you watching my birdie?"

Council of despair

Sir,

As one who has worked for or near the British Council for 40 years in the TEFL world, I think your organ is very hard on the British Council (Eye 1202). It's true that at times there have been a number of pretty naff policy decisions, but many of these were derived from the perennial need for the BC to make ends meet. In what other country but Britain would a prestigious national institution devoted to cultural relations (which generate benefits that are notoriously difficult to quantify) be reduced to the aim you mention (of 'signing up lucrative foreign students for UK universities')? The French invest four times as much in their comparable missions, the Germans more than twice as much, and it shows.

Incidentally, have you any photographs which might illustrate basic aspects of intercultural relations?

Sincerely,
JOHN PIDCOCK,

Via email.

Poster campaign

Sir,

Re: Who's Who at the top of the BBC.

True, the glossy "cut out 'n' keep" poster of top BBC glitterati will no doubt grace the shrines of the faithful (Eye 1203).

But this collector's item is more than just a gallery.

Bordering the poster are several advertisements for the services of commercial television outside broadcast resource providers.

Having just sold off the BBC's own world-leading Television OB department to a slow death, the great and the good will find such guidance most useful should they wish to actually make any programmes in the future.

And what a glorious kick in the nuts to the many staff in BBC Resources who are already staring at a very gloomy, redundant future.

(I'm sure you will appreciate that, as someone quite close to these issues, I would prefer my name and email address not to be published)

ANON,

Via email.

Evans above

Sir,

*Did I miss something in the world of football – just that the Premiersh*ts cartoon (Eye 1203) featured Manchester United players watching a video of the 1958 United side, with commentary about how things were different, what with the maximum wage and nobody being accused of rape after a club party.*

The players? Evra, Nani, Vidic and Evans. That'd be the same Jonny Evans who wouldn't have been present, since he's with Sunderland for the rest of the season (and for the sake of pedantry) and would have been in Northern Ireland on the day of the Munich memorials?

IAN HAMILTON,

Via email.

● ***Paul Wood writes:*** *Yes, Evans is away at Sunderland but he's only on* loan *and so he's still, er, technically a Man United player. The fact that the showing of the DVD was anything up to a week* before *the memorials/internationals makes the argument that he was away irrelevant.*

Cruise control

Sir,

Andrew Morton's biography of Tom Cruise is quite easy to obtain from an American bookseller. I regularly use www.abebooks.com and recently obtained Rachel Ehrenfeld's Funding Evil, *a book currently banned in Britain as you know, although somehow I don't think I'll bother to get the Tom Cruise book. What is more, whereas I have used Amazon's marketplace booksellers and on two occasions the book has simply failed to arrive although Amazon took my cash, I have always found the Americans prompt, efficient and totally reliable. Two cheers for freedom of speech whatever else you may want to complain about America.*

Yours sincerely,
HUGH SCHOLLICK,

Southport.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

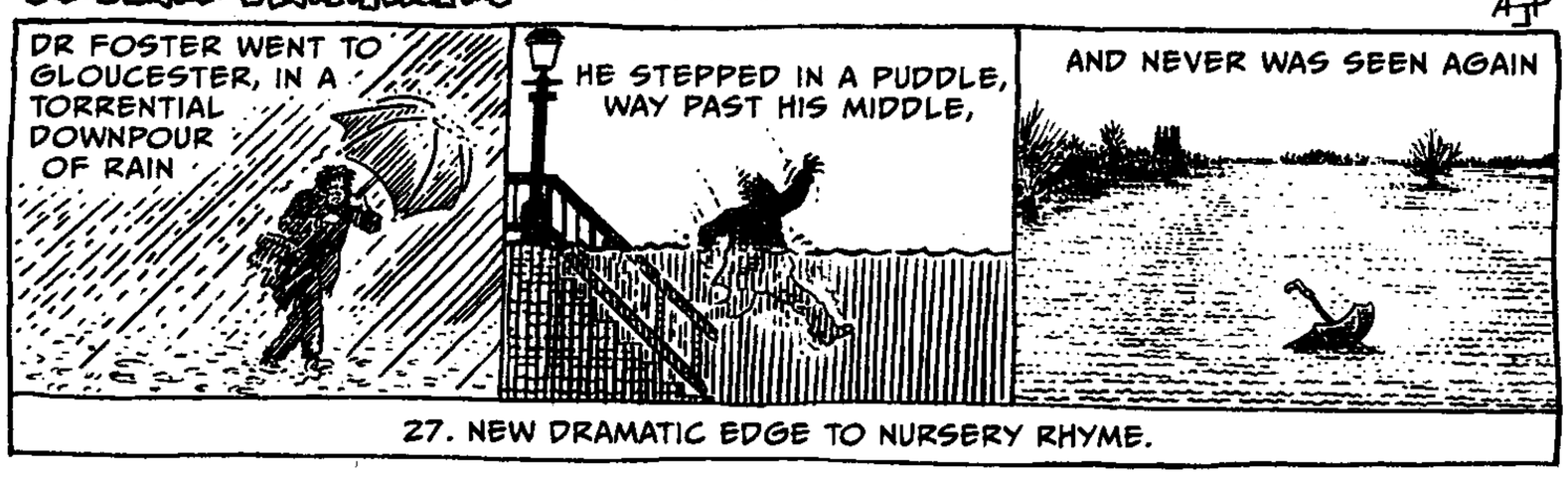
"He [Arsene Wenger] selected a team that was stronger than he had available to him."
JOHN ANDERSON, Radio 4
(Tony Connell)

"He dived one-handed like a swan..."
Commentator, BBC
(Vicky Hogg)

"We're a long way from being where we are."
STEVEN GERRARD, BBC1
(Carl Skelton)

"... He was nearly a victim of his own demise."
ADAM BAKER, BBC Radio Bristol
(Brian Maynard)

"We will be inviting survivors and their families, and the victims [of the Manchester United Munich air crash] and their families."
DAVID GILL, Radio 4
(Matthew Carse)


GLOBAL WARMING THE PLUS SIDE
AJP
DR FOSTER WENT TO GLOUCESTER, IN A TORRENTIAL DOWNPOUR OF RAIN
HE STEPPED IN A PUDDLE, WAY PAST HIS MIDDLE,
AND NEVER WAS SEEN AGAIN
27. NEW DRAMATIC EDGE TO NURSERY RHYME.

Ped'ants Corner

... It's a very minor quibble I know, but in the piece on the Newsnight-Muslim Public Affairs Committee dispute (Eye 1203, p. 8) you refer to Sayyed Qutb as "the intellectual father of al-Qaeda and every other supporter of mass murder by suicide bombings*" (my emphasis). In fact, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are widely regarded as having pioneered suicide attacks as a modern terror tactic, and as a secular nationalist movement the (predominately Hindu) Tigers owe no debt, intellectual or otherwise, to the Islamist Qutb and his revolting ideology. Indeed, in 1990 the LTTE forcibly expelled the Muslim population of Jaffna in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, an act that would make a very incongruous addition to Qutb's legacy.*

IAN MACBETH.

... Simply for clarification and at the risk of being dubbed a pedant, I feel I must point out an error regarding the closure of St. George's Catholic primary school (Rotten Boroughs, Eye 1203). The decision to close a Roman Catholic school is not just taken by the Local Authority, in this case Salford city council, but must be agreed, if not instigated, by the controlling Diocese (in this case Salford). Whilst the cost for managing the protest march is, as you very rightly point out, in the hands of the local authority, the reasons behind the decision to close a popular and successful school need to be addressed to the RC Bishop of Salford, whose response I feel sure would prove enlightening.

BOB SHEPPHARD.

... Re Dumb Britain (Issue 1202): Somebody ought to point out to John Humphrys (though undoubtedly some Oxford nerd who watches "Celebrity Mastermind" has already) that when the Ashmolean opened in 1683 it was in Broad Street, not Beaumont Street. The Old Ashmolean is still in Broad Street, where it now houses the Museum of the History of Science. It wouldn't matter, except that Humphrys is always right. So... celebrity Britain is just as dumb as the rest of us, and I am as much a pedantic nerd as the rest of your readers.

SUE SHERRATT.

... Issue 1203 p.5 (... Dumb Britain... Still available at the extraordinarily un-dumb price of just £3.49)

Issue 1203 p39 (subscribe to Private Eye and receive this Dumb Britain book absolutely FREE – "worth" £4.99)

DOUGAL McKINNON.

● *The cover price of Dumb Britain is £4.99. Online retailers such as Waterstone's and Amazon sell it more cheaply. Subscribe to Private Eye for a modest £28 and receive a copy of Dumb Britain ABSOLUTELY FREE!*

Letter from **Caracas**

from Our Own Correspondent

WE Venezuelans are overjoyed at our president's far-sighted decision to appoint a cabinet-level commission to determine, once and for all, the truth about the death in 1830 of the Liberator, Simón Bolívar. At last that nonsense about tuberculosis can be revealed for what it really is: a smokescreen laid down by the Colombian oligarchy, on instructions from Washington DC, to cover up his poisoning.

The fact that no evidence has ever emerged to suggest poisoning, while the TB theory enjoys abundant documentation, reveals the extent, and longevity, of the counter-revolutionary media conspiracy that has for so long sought to conceal from *el pueblo* the savage capitalist plot to frustrate the Liberator's dream of a socialist revolution in the land of his birth.

But at last we have a leader, in Hugo Chávez, who can see beyond the humdrum needs of his people – milk, bread, housing, freedom to leave your home without being robbed at gunpoint – to what really matters. And what might that be? No more nor less than the completion of Bolívar's unfinished work: the establishment of a revolutionary socialist utopia under the guidance of Comrade Chávez.

There are those – imperialist lackeys, capitalist stooges and even the odd *chavista* who is confused by the lies and distortions of the bourgeois media – who suggest that assigning this task to almost a dozen cabinet ministers, including the vice-president and the holders of the foreign, finance and interior portfolios, could distract them from somewhat more important duties. Indeed, many of those who are whingeing the loudest are the same traitors and backsliders who blame the current temporary shortages of milk, cooking oil, sugar, flour, chicken, meat, black beans and car parts, etc, on the incompetence of the Revolution, rather than on the hoarders, speculators and coup-plotters who are really behind it.

Some go so far as to suggest that the leader has his priorities mixed up. That it would be better, for instance, to try to find out who murdered top public prosecutor Danilo Anderson in November 2004. Or who hid evil Peruvian spymaster Vladimiro Montesinos in Venezuela in 2001. Or what really happened on 11 April 2002 when a score of demonstrators were gunned down in the streets of Caracas and the country's top general said the president had resigned. Or even what the final result was in last December's constitutional reform referendum.

What these doubting Thomases and fifth-columnists fail to realize, however, is that once we know for certain who put the arsenic in our independence hero's bedtime mug of cocoa, all the rest will fall into place. For who can doubt that it was the CIA that planted Montesinos in Caracas in a bid to besmirch the Leader's reputation? Who can forget the testimony of the fake psychologist and serial fraudster who revealed the role of right-wing Colombian paramilitaries, the FBI and the Catholic church in the murder of Anderson? And when will people finally get it into their heads that Chávez's so-called "resignation" in April 2002 was fabricated by the media on the basis of a press statement by – you guessed it – the US state department?

He's been called a madman. He's been dismissed as a paranoid fantasist with an overblown sense of his own importance. Some have even used his recent declaration that he was consuming "coca paste" to accuse him of being a drug-user. But just because you're paranoid, it doesn't mean they're not after you.

A seamless web, an unbroken chain, connects the dying Simón Bolívar, bedridden in Santa Marta, with our own revered Comandante. The same evil forces that poisoned the Liberator's cocoa are, even now, plotting to spike the strawberry ice-cream from Coppelia in Havana that Fidel sends him every week. But they'll never get away with it! *Patria, socialismo o muerte!! Venceremos!!*

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"Andrew Roth is pleased to present a new exhibition and artist's book by Nicolas Guagnini. '77 Testicular Imprints' consists of 77 paintings, produced with oil paint applied directly to the artist's testicles and imprinted on various bound and ephemeral printed matter, including: mainstream magazines such as Time and Life; art market staples such as Artforum, Art in America, and Art News; exhibition and auction catalogues; rare magazines and artist's books; and an assortment of original artworks, poems, and studio notes by Vito Acconci, Simon Bedwell, Alejandro Cesarco and Dan Graham.

"In an act of transforming them into paintings, Guagnini suspends their original use value by altering their commodity of exchange through an act of artistic intervention. They can no longer be handled. Like Marcel Broodthaers' eagles, the testicular imprints also delineate a critical archive, acting like stamps of inclusion. What Guagnini establishes through this process are the relationships

between Patriarchy, Private Property, Power, Progress, Position, Packaging and Personality in twentieth-century art production.

"The placement, color, and materiality of the oil testicular imprints cohere into a precise critical and aesthetic statement about the images on which they intervene. In certain instances they are placed in a complimentary position with the image, at other times they obliterate specific parts of the image or text, generating new and unexpected meanings. '77 Testicular Imprints' is published in a limited edition of 500 copies, of which 16 are bound in cloth, signed, and numbered, and include an original artist's painting on the cover." *(Artforum, December 2007 and Andrew Roth catalogue. Spotter: Anon)*

– o –

o *"People nowadays fear catching bird flu if they eat chicken or duck meat, or blue-ear disease if they eat pork," Nguyen Van Sang told reporters at the Chau Hung market in the Mekong Delta, "so they think 'what can we eat?' and they come to buy mice from my stall. When I began selling them ten years ago, my only customers were python breeders, but nowadays I'm selling four to five tons of mice every day, almost all for human consumption. Many bistros are proud to have mice on the menu, and mouse trapping has become a professional occupation."*

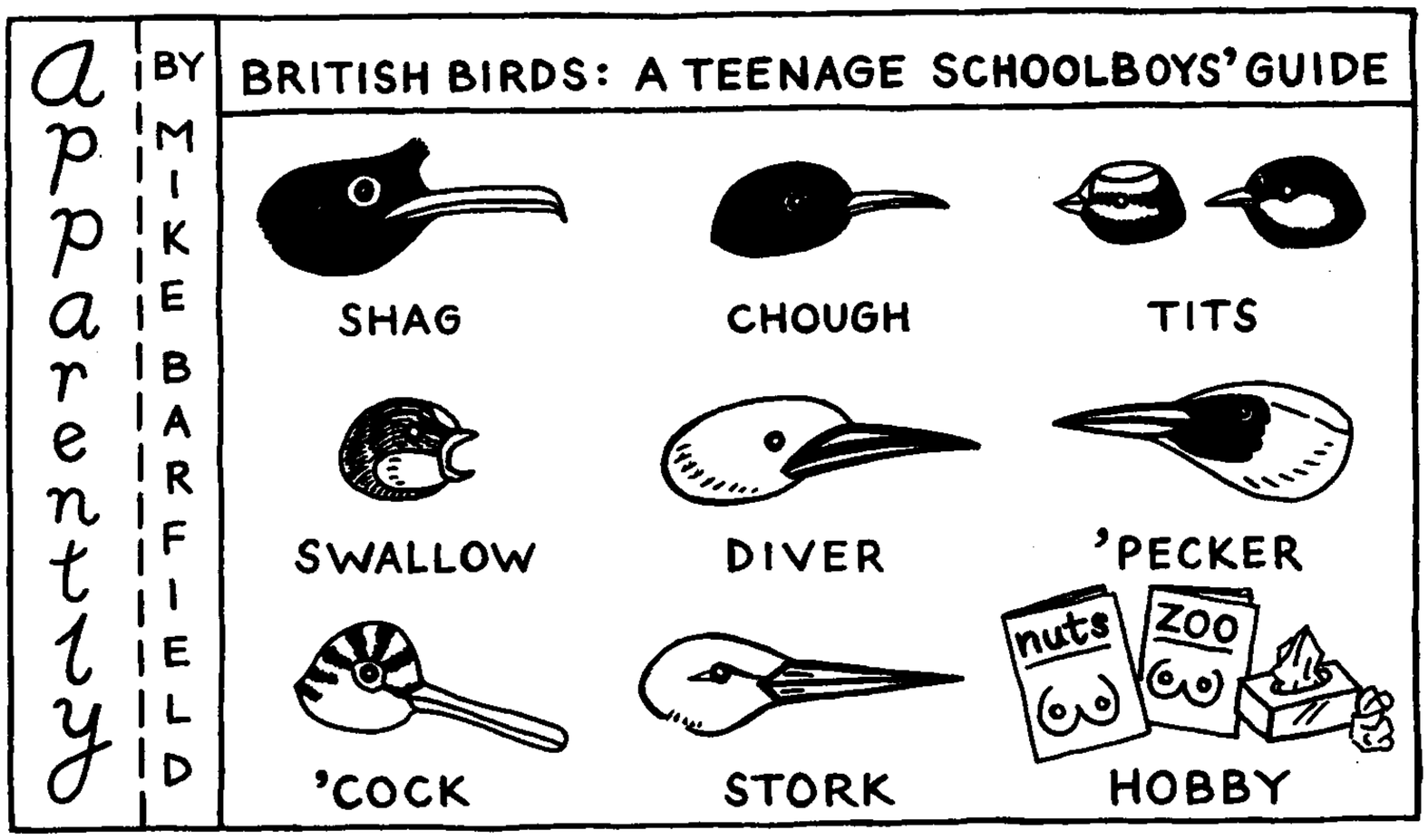
Mouse trapper Tran Van Hoa then told reporters how he earned his living. "Each night, I set about 150 small iron cages in rice fields, and catch about 50 mice. I bait them with rice flour, but every night I have to walk further and further from my home, because mice are highly devious, and soon learn to recognise the danger of the traps. The job is risky, because poisonous snakes also hunt for mice at night, but I do not give what a tinker would cuss. I make about VND60,000 a night, which is a lot for someone like me, with no education."

Restaurant owner Diem added that her mouse restaurant was becoming busier every day. "My customers include government officials and business people, as well as workers. Our best-selling dish is the house speciality, roasted giant mouse with lemon grass." (Thanh Nien Daily, 29/12/07. Spotter: Alan Murray)

– o –

o "There are no grounds that allow us to say definitively that UFOs do not exist," Japanese Defence Minister Shigeru Ishiba told a press conference in Tokyo, "and there may be potential legal issues if and when a UFO arrives in Japan. It is difficult to determine on what legal grounds our Self-Defence Forces may be mobilised, and various possibilities should be considered. What if there was a violation of Japanese airspace, but the violating subject was not hostile? Would mobilising the SDF be an act of defence? That would clearly not be the case if the extra-terrestrials say 'everyone on Earth, let us be friends.' And what if we cannot figure out what they're saying? However, if Godzilla comes, that is simpler. Obviously, that would require mobilisation of SDF troops for disaster relief."

The official position of the Japanese government is that "the existence of UFOs is unconfirmed." However, Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura has declared himself to be a firm believer in UFOs, citing Peru's Nazca Lines as evidence. *(Japan Today, 21/12/07. Spotter: Gareth Davies)*



PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 15

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

Let it not be said that the Supreme Leader is only concerned with the day-to-day issues of economic stability and financial prudence, important though these may be, as Comrade Darling is well aware and will have to answer for in due course. Comrade Darling has been accused of dithering over the crisis in Sub-Prime-Northern-Rockist capitalism and there have been calls for me to purge him. At present, I am reserving judgement on this difficult issue.

No, there are other dimensions to our British life which have also demanded my attention as we construct the new Britain, matters calling for new vision of the highest order.

This is why I have instructed two of my most trusted lieutenants, drawn from the youthful cadre of revolutionary Brown-ists, Comrades Balls and Burnham, to draw up a manifesto for what is to become nothing less than a Cultural Revolution for the young comrades of tomorrow. This is what I have called "The Five Hour Plan". Comrade Burnham will explain below the details of how we are to transform Britain's youth into the most cultured and artistic young persons in the world.

This will wipe clean the graffiti-smeared slate of the failed years of Blairite-Blunkettism which have left our young people starved of the life blood of their national culture.

Comrade Burnham writes:

This is our blueprint for the implementation of the Supreme Leader's inspiring vision:

1. All British young people are to be given the opportunity to read and write and to count up to 10, to equip them to compete in the global economy.

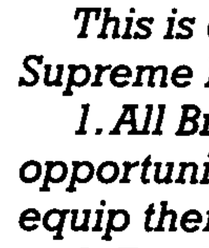
2. For this purpose, trained cadres of experts, to be known as "teachers", will be deployed throughout the nation in special institutions to be known as "schools".

3. Young comrades will further be offered a compulsory "Five Hours A Week" of "cultural training".

4. This will consist of visits to the opera, art galleries, museums, theatres and architectural monuments, as well as trips to European cultural capitals, such as Paris or Rome.

5. To pay for the above, we have allocated the sum of 15p per annum for each school student, which, though it may seem generous, nevertheless reflects our deep commitment to the Supreme Leader's vision of "An Age Of Culture".

6. Teachers will welcome the chance to work longer hours for no extra remuneration in order to fulfil "The Five Hour Plan".



Signed
Comrade Andy Burnham, Commissar for Cultural Advancement, Media Studies and Premier League Football

Thank you, Comrade Burnham, for an admirable presentation. I will now ask Comrade Balls to explain our equally exciting vision of an "electronic CV" for every child.

Comrade Balls writes:

I am grateful to the Supreme Leader for allowing me to present his revolutionary and modernising plan to create an electronic database of the achievements of every child from age 0 to 90.

This is yet another example of the Party's mastery of new technology, which has been applied so successfully in every sphere, from the NHS to the Inland Revenue, from passport applications to the payment of our farmers.

And in all this we have maintained a 100% record of confidentiality, with sensitive personal information made available only to those who steal laptops or visit local rubbish tips.

Now our children too are being brought into the IT age (with the aid of our latest computer system, "Big Brother"). This will enable the State to keep an eye on the progress of all our young people more effectively than has ever been done before.

We shall, for instance, be able to spot early any non-productive elements in the future workforce, and be able to crack down on all potential slackers, scroungers, parasites, neo-Cameronite deviationists, quasi-Goveist Lib Dems and other social undesirables.

Signed
Comrade Balls, Commissar for Pre-School Lunches, Lifelong Incapacity Benefit and Leisure-Based Skills.

Thank you, Comrade Balls, for your able exposition of another of our inspirational initiatives, which will be rolled out between now and the year 2015, according to latest estimates from the consultants responsible for this scheme, Cocupita Systems.

Signed Gordon Brown

AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Statement by Comrade Millie Band, Commissar for Foreign Affairs

We in the Age of Change are fully prepared to admit that, when it comes to foreign affairs, mistakes were made under the regime of the discredited former leader, ex-Comrade Blair, with his doctrine of Neo-Condoleezzist-Busho-Rumsfeldite foreign interventionism.

This idea that you could go around the world, invading other countries and forcing them to be come democracies, has been totally discredited.

That is why from now on we will be pursuing an entirely new policy of going round the world invading other countries and forcing them to become democracies, as I said only the other day to Comrade Condoleeza, when we made a joint visit to Afghanistan to encourage our brave troops in their gallant mission to impose democracy on the Afghan people.

Comrade Millie Band

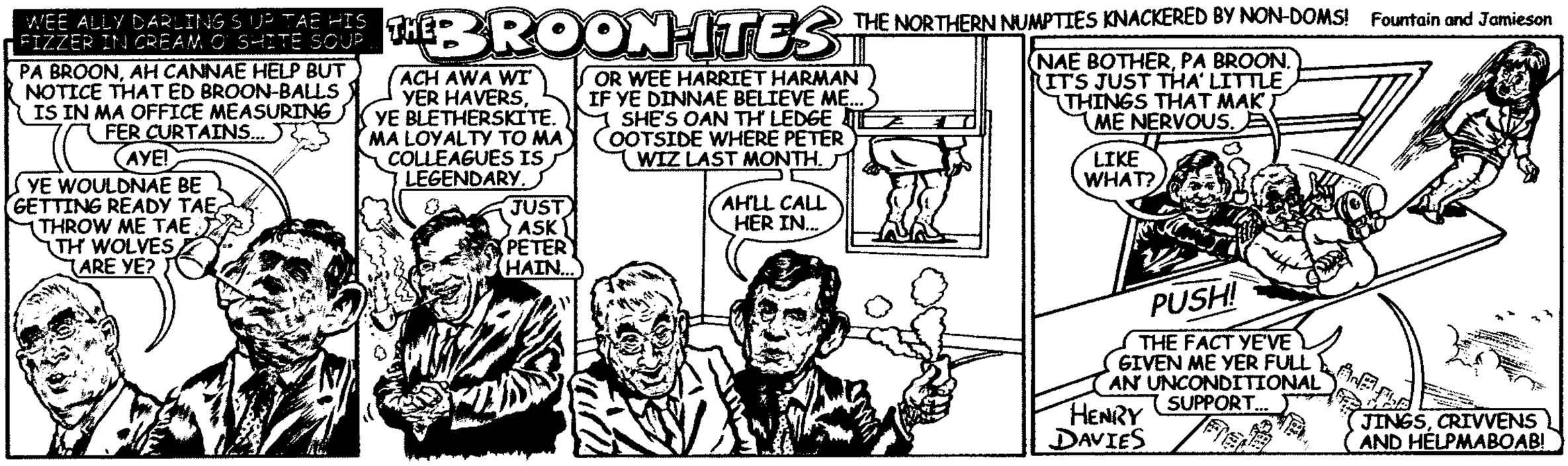
Enemy of the People

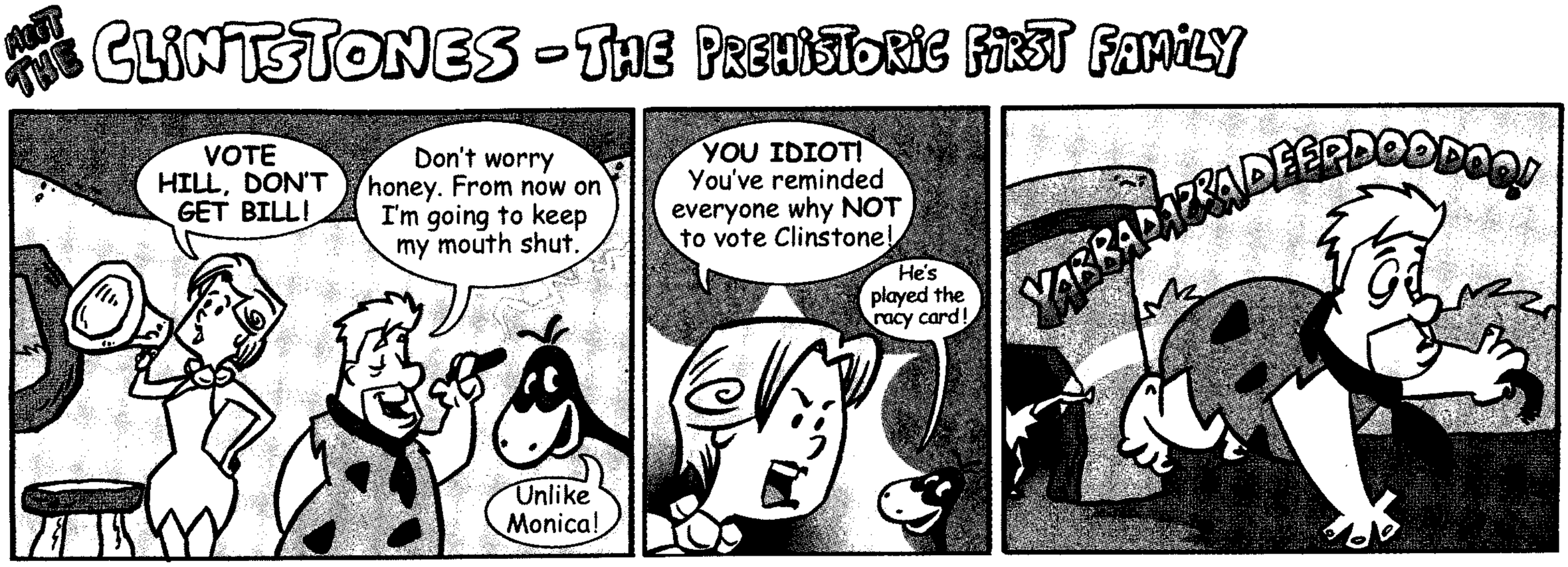
Charles Clarke

Once again it is my unpleasant duty to record an attack on the Supreme Leader by the obese, embittered careerist Blair-ite running dog, ex-Comrade Clarke, who is plotting to be Supreme Leader himself and who chose to publicly denounce me as being guilty of "ditherism" . I have not yet made up my mind how to respond to this, but I will return to the subject in future bulletins. G.B.

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS

THERE'S A NEW CHAP ON THE BLOCK WHO WANTS TO DO A DEAL WITH DAVE!
WHAT'S HE LIKE?
NICK CLEGG
... BLAND, EX-PUBLIC SCHOOL - AND WILL SAY ANYTHING TO BE POPULAR
YES, WE ALL KNOW ABOUT SNOOTY! WHAT ABOUT THIS FELLOW CLEGG?
WELL, HE'S MADE QUITE AN IMPRESSION!
HERE'S MY IMPRESSION OF DAVE SNOOTY DOING AN IMPRESSION OF TONY BLAIR...
NO WONDER HE'S CALLED 'NICK' - HE'S NICKED MY IDENTITY, EH, READERS !?!


WEE ALLY DARLING S UP TAE HIS FIZZER IN CREAM O' SHITE SOUP
THE BROON-ITES
THE NORTHERN NUMPTIES KNACKERED BY NON-DOMS!
Fountain and Jamieson
PA BROON, AH CANNAE HELP BUT NOTICE THAT ED BROON-BALLS IS IN MA OFFICE MEASURING FER CURTAINS...
AYE!
YE WOULDNAE BE GETTING READY TAE THROW ME TAE TH' WOLVES ARE YE?
ACH AWA WI' YER HAVERS, YE BLETHERSKITE. MA LOYALTY TO MA COLLEAGUES IS LEGENDARY.
JUST ASK PETER HAIN...
OR WEE HARRIET HARMAN IF YE DINNAE BELIEVE ME... SHE'S OAN TH' LEDGE OOTSIDE WHERE PETER WIZ LAST MONTH.
AH'LL CALL HER IN...
NAE BOTHER, PA BROON. IT'S JUST THA' LITTLE THINGS THAT MAK' ME NERVOUS.
LIKE WHAT?
PUSH!
THE FACT YE'VE GIVEN ME YER FULL AN' UNCONDITIONAL SUPPORT...
HENRY DAVIES
JINGS, CRIVVENS AND HELPMABOAB!


MEET THE CLINTSTONES - THE PREHISTORIC FIRST FAMILY
VOTE HILL, DON'T GET BILL!
Don't worry honey. From now on I'm going to keep my mouth shut.
Unlike Monica!
YOU IDIOT! You've reminded everyone why NOT to vote Clinstone!
He's played the racy card!
YABBADABBADEEPDOODOO!

Celeb

LIGGER

BACK IN A MO...
OH NO!.. EVER SINCE THE SMOKING BAN IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME WHEN WE GO OUT..
YOU DON'T REALLY NEED A CIGARETTE, DEBS...
YES I DO.
YOU'RE JUST FEEDING YOUR PSYCHO-LOGICAL CRAVING... YOU DON'T EVEN ENJOY SMOKING... YOU'RE JUST USING THIS AS A PROP...
YOU DON'T EVEN INHALE, DEBS..
YES, BUT I DON'T WANT THE PAPS TO REALISE I ONLY GO OUTSIDE THE CLUB TO BE SNAPPED, DO I?
OH WELL... OFF YOU GO THEN..

Appeal

Save Our Non-Doms!

SOME of Britain's wealthiest and most unpleasant men are in danger of having to go abroad to avoid paying their taxes.

Just consider the plight of some of these victims of the persecution planned by the heartless British government.

Oligarski Sonovabitch, Russia's richest crook, has 25 homes in Britain and is said to be worth £500 billion. Under Darling's shock crackdown, he would be forced to hand over as much as £10.50 to the Inland Revenue, or emigrate to Monaco where he has another 25 homes and a very large yacht.

Don 'The Godfather' Corblimeone, Italian entrepreneur with a broad portfolio of commercial interests, ranging from ice creams to cocaine, is believed to be worth £500 billion. Faced by Darling's ruthless new tax regime, he would be forced to send "the boys" round to Number 11 to get the law changed.

Bakshish Bakhanda, the samosas-to-steel magnate, has been a major donor to the Labour Party and is said to be worth £500 billion. Under Darling's draconian squeeze, he would be forced to go back to India where he would be arrested.

'Non-Dom' Lawson, former editor of the Sunday Telegraph and currently respected brother of TV's Nigella, Unfortunately, Non-Dom doesn't currently earn enough from the *Independent* to pay any tax at all.

Don't Screw The Rich – Use A Non-Dom!

Write to your MP at once demanding justice for this persecuted minority, without whom the whole island of Britain would soon sink into the sea.

VENUS GOES FOR IT!

Art News

RUSSIAN EXECUTION OPENS

by Our Exhibition Staff **Olly Gark**

AN EXTRAORDINARY collection of Russian murders is now on display in Britain.

Connoisseurs of the art of Russian killing are delighted by the quality of the murders that the British public can now experience for the first time.

Said one expert, "The Litvinenko is of course a masterpiece but there are some extraordinary new works here too, like the Patarkatsishvili, which takes your breath away – and indeed his."

While some critics doubt the authenticity of the Patarkatsishvili, claiming it's not a genuine murder, the consensus view remains that the Russian artists working with experimental materials like polonium have taken this traditional form to a new level.

Art Attack

Said the Russian organiser of the exhibition, a Mr R.A.S. Putin, "I challenge any critic to find fault with what we have done because if they do they are liable to wind up dead."

The Execution continues.

"We just want to welcome you to the village and hope that you'll be very happy here"

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Spiritual Leader and friend of the Beatles

So. Farewell
Then the Maharishi –
As you were known to
Your millions of
Followers.

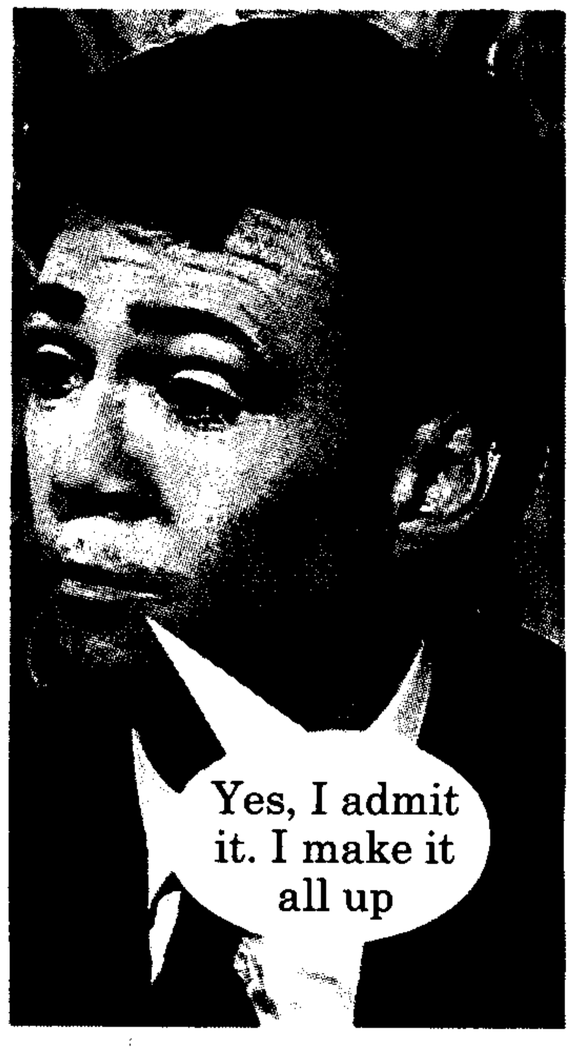
Except for *Private Eye*, who called you
The Veririshi
Lotsamoni
Yogi Bear.

"Everything passes."
That was your
Catchphrase.

And now
You have.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

ANDY BURNHAM IN 'QUESTION TIME' MAKE-UP SHOCK



Nationwide Fury Erupts As Archbishop 'Converts To Islam'

by Our Political Staff The Rev. Rowan Pelling

A STORM of anger engulfed Britain today following an unprecedented outburst from Britain's top prelate, Rowan Atkinson.

Addressing an audience of several other men with beards attending a theological conference at St Dullstan's, the Archbishop of Canterbury was speaking on the theme of "Toward Multi-Cultural Plurality in a Secular Society".

The Rev. Atkinson's astonishing references to Sharia law, Islam and the role of patio heaters in promoting global warming immediately made headlines across the world.

Off With His Beard!

The Queen herself was said to be "furious" and "deeply disturbed" at what she privately referred to as "Dr Williams's treasonable conversion to Mohammedanism".

The leaders of all three political parties were quick to condemn a speech which none of them had heard.

A Downing Street spokesman said, "The suggestion that we should erect giant cranes in London and hang people from them flies in the face of our British traditions of fair play."

A spokesman for Mr David Cameron and Mr Nick Clegg said, "We agree with every word the Prime Minister said. He is quite right to call for the Archbishop to be hanged from a crane in central London – that is the way we do things in this country."

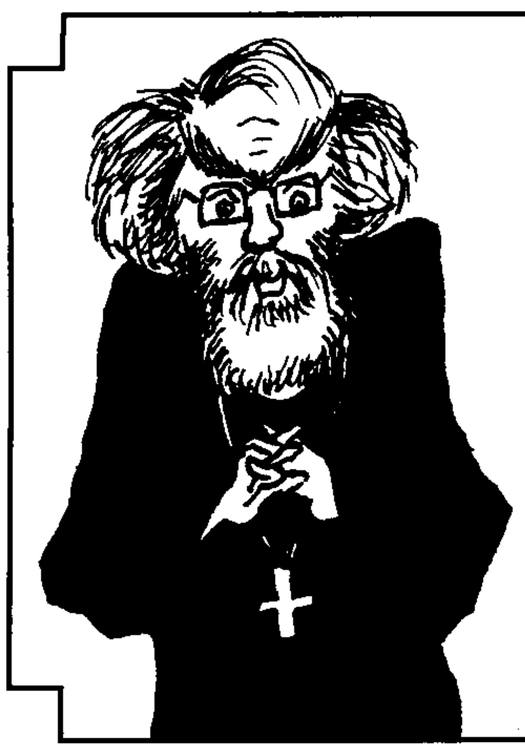
Other church leaders joined in the wave of protests. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Cariaandsharia, said, "I was much better at being Archbishop than him."

The Chief Imam of Tunbridge Wells, Abu Hamsa Kneesand-bumpsemoff, said, "How dare the Archbishop suggest that Islamic law should be imposed on Britain? It is an insult to the Prophet. He should be strung up from a crane."

Stone Me!

The general public too were quick to express their outrage at the Archbishop's suggestion that all British schoolgirls should be forced to wear head-to-toe burqas or be stoned to death.

Said a typical London cab driver, summing up the nation's mood, "Blimey, guv. That Archbishop, what a twat. Those Muslims go around having eight wives – I mean, one's bad enough! Ha, ha, ha. I've just bought one of them patio heaters. Fantastic. Like a ruddy toaster in my garden now. I was sitting there in my vest last night, having a fag. That Archbishop must be off his rocker. If he thinks I'm going to stop the cab every five minutes to pray to Mecca, you'd never get wherever it was you were going. Where was it? Newton Abbot, did you say? I'll have to get one of those satnavs."



Thought for the Day

From The Archbishop Of Canterbury

"And there now abideth these three – faith, hope and clarity. And the greatest of these is clarity."

That Shock Lecture In Full – The Words That Shook The Nation

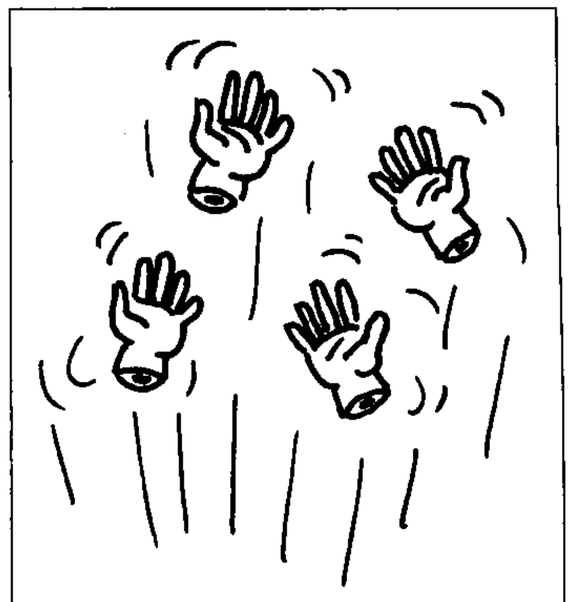
...Whilst it may be argued that some form of compromise may have to be reached, between the divergent demands of the moral and ideological traditions of the various faith-communities which co-exist in parallelity, as opposed to a hierarchical relationship whereby the secular imperative dominates to the detriment of those value-systems and prescriptions which underwrite the belief-structures integral to the major Abrahamic and indeed other non-Abrahamic world religious grapefruit segments...

STOP PRESS

Archbishop 'Says Sorry And Returns To Church of England'

In a shock clarification last night, the Archbishop of Canterbury claimed that his controversial speech had been "misunderstood" by everyone, including himself.

To a standing ovation lasting several hours, he told the General Synod, "If there has been an inadvertent unclarity with regard to my views on the grapefruit segment issue, then let me make it clear that at no point was I advocating a parallel segmentation of these fruit systems which might in due course lead to a regrettable but inevitable grapefruit-isation, as I think we have to call it, of British culture and indeed all other *(cont. p. 94)*



"Hands up, all those against Sharia law"

Should Sharia Blair Be Stoned To Death? *You Decide*

This woman was found guilty of helping herself to vast sums of money by claiming that she was the wife of the Prime Minister of Britain.

What do you think her punishment should be?

- **A 80 lashes**
- **B Hands cut off**
- **C Buried alive**
- **D Agreeable job in City**

Vote online at www.shariablair.co.uk

"Boozing, puking, swearing, fighting... those blokes are just so girly"

DI-LY EXPRESS
THE WORLD'S GREATEST NEWSPAPER AND PROUD OF IT FRIDAY FEBRUARY 22, 2008

WAS FAYED DIANA ALL ALONG?

By Court Reporter **Maddie Tup**

NEW photographic evidence revealed yesterday showing a picture taken a the Harrod's sale in January 2001, proves conclusively that (*cont. p94*).

● **ON OTHER PAGES: What The Butler Swore**

Advertisement

SLEAZY JET

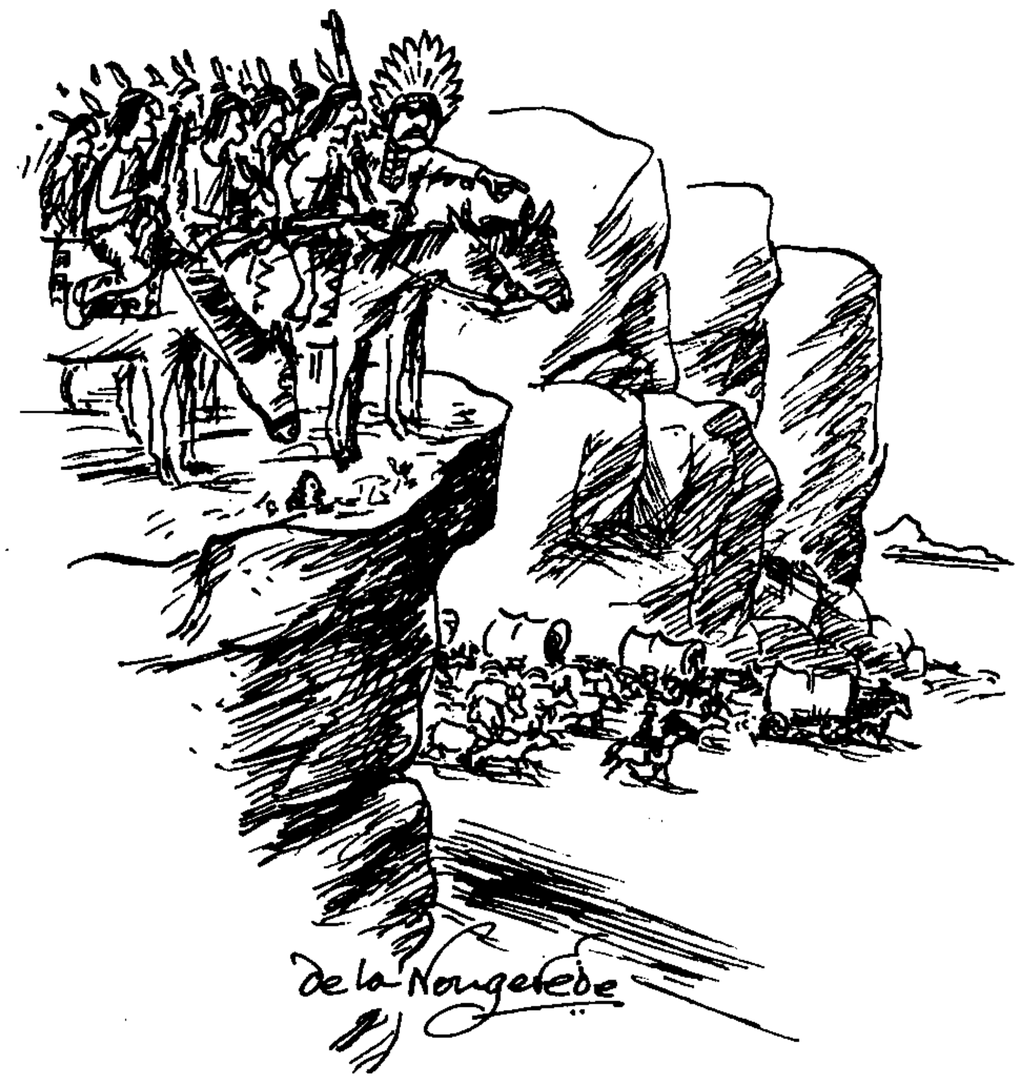
FREE-EST FLIGHTS ON THE MARKET!

Just look at these amazing deals:

● **London to Glasgow £0**
● **Glasgow to London £0**
● **London to Caribbean £0**

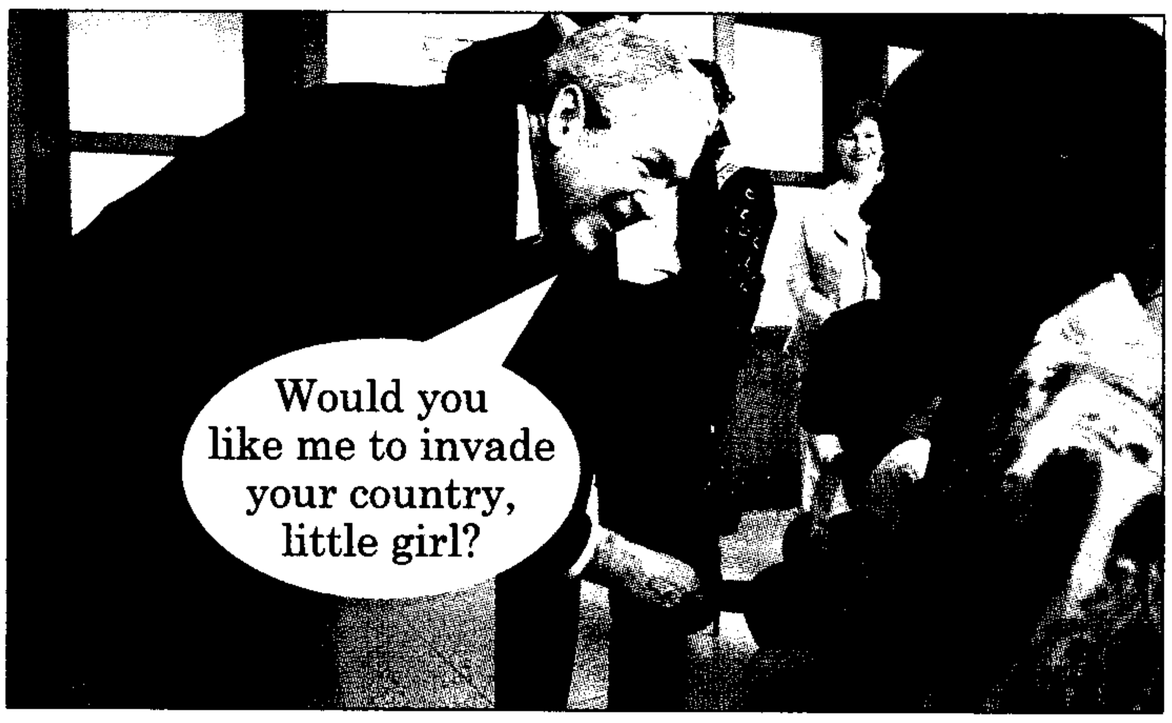
We defy you to find cheaper flights anywhere!

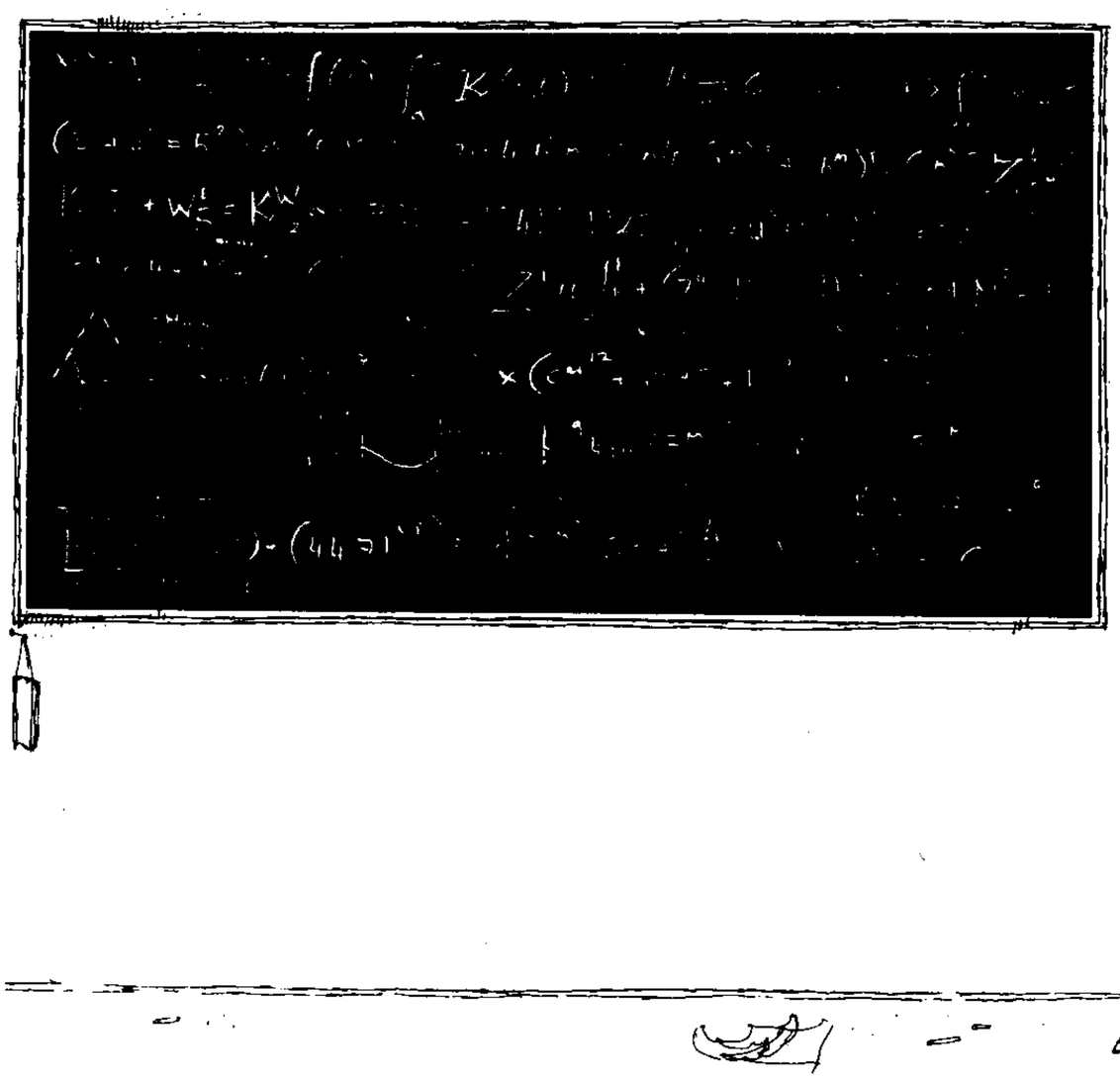
Offer applies only to the Speaker of the House of Commons and members of his family.



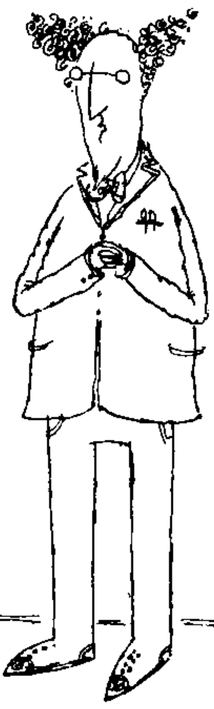
"Property developers come, destroy everything. Kill! Kill! Kill!"

AFRICAN BUSH





"It was so obvious, it was staring me in the face..."



EXCLUSIVE TO ALL TABLOIDS

'IT'S DISTURBINGLY STICK THIN'

EDITORS today expressed fears for the health of those tabloids still filling their front pages with the story of a drunken footballer cheating on his wife.

"The story was thin enough the first time round, but now it's looking painfully thin as they try and drag it out for another week," said a *(cont. p. 94)*

Poor circulation?

Nursery Times

Friday, February 22, 2008

KING FUG GOES ON SHOW

by Our Legal Staff **Howard Carter-Fuck**

MILLIONS queued today outside the Law Courts to see the fabled 'King Fug', on show for the first time in London.

The legendary King Fugginarshole – to give him his full Egyptian name – is over 83 years old but still manages to cast a hypnotic spell over subsequent generations with his immortal curse, "It was the fuggin' Duke of Edinburgh, MI6 and the fuggin' Loch Ness Monster."

Fiat Justitia

Rivals who suffered from the "Curse of Fug" included African potentate "Tiny" M'Rowland, who died in mysterious circumstances at the age of 96 when stung by a mysterious Egyptian wasp when travelling in Uganda. *(Is this right? Ed.)*

In his palace at Harrods, King 'Fug' held sway with a court of toadying eunuchs led by the Chief Bouffant, Mike al-Cole, who attended his master's every whim with a loyalty and devotion unparalleled in human history.

In De Nile

Legend has it that young handmaidens quailed as King Fug approached them for "favours" as they toiled slicing bacon in the Food Hall.

But, in spite of his opulence and wealth, King Fug feared for his own life and surrounded himself with bodyguards who were usually drunk and were unsafe when put in charge of the Royal Chariot – often colliding with pyramids or Cleopatra's Needles.

Henri Paul-Bearer

One exhibit bound to be popular with visitors is the mile-high pile of gold which King Fug gave to his trusty lawyer, Mike al-Manservant, in exchange for telling lies before the Supreme Judges.

But undoubtedly the highlight of this exhibition will be the death mask of King Fug himself, the image of the Bore King which is one of the supreme wonders of the world and which *(cont. p. 94)*

Advertisement

OPENING THIS WEEK
LAST FEW PERFORMANCES –
WHAT YOU WON'T GO TO SEE

'THEY FLEW TO BRUGES' Live On Stage

THE iconic 1940s cinematic masterpiece is now brought to the theatre for the first time by the Should Know Better Theatre Company.

To make it more accessible to theatre-going audiences, the legendary wartime airmen no longer fly to Bruges, but go to Didcot Parkway railway station where they meet the cast of "Brief Encounter" whilst waiting for the replacement bus service.

The role of Squadron Leader "Chalky" White, originally played by David Niven, is now performed by TV's James Nesbitt. WAAF Sergeant Peggy Dolittle, the part created by Dame Anna Neagle, is now played by someone from Emmerdale.

Don't miss the wonderful period songs, including "Any Dream Will Do" from TV's "Joseph" and the "Bruges Rap" by DJ "Thinboy" Taylor. *(That's enough films turned into plays, Ed.)*

BIG EARS – 'I'M NOT TOO OLD'

by Our Political Staff **Squirrel Nutcase**

THE VETERAN gnome, Charles Big Ears, today shocked Toytown by claiming that he should take over as car driver from his long-term rival, Noddy.

Said Big Ears, "I have great respect for Noddy but he is useless behind the wheel. He is going nowhere and it is time that a man with bigger ears took control."

Critics, however, said that Big Ears was too old and too fat to get into the car. But Big Ears denied the obesity

charge, "I admit that I am a heavyweight, but I am a safe pair of ears – unlike Noddy, who is a bastard."

On Other Pages

● Noddy Takes Over Toy Town Bank **p3** ● Toytoon Utd. Yet To Win Under New Boss King Kev **p4** ● Jemima Puddleduck on The Bhutto Legacy In Post-Musharaff Pakistan **p94**

PLUS Watch Nursery Times TV. Simon Heiffer goes 'Moo!' LIVE!

ST CAKES PUPILS IN SHOCK FIGHTING ROW

by Our Educational Staff **Robert McScrum**

ST CAKES, the prestigious Midlands independent fee-paying school for boys (motto: Quis Paget Entrat), has found itself this week at the centre of a media furore.

A newspaper report alleged that at the annual pitched battle between boys of St. Cakes and rival public school Biscuit College, a game of rugby broke out and "lasted for several minutes".

Marlboro Fight

Headmaster Mr R.J. Kipling was quick to deny the story, telling reporters, "This is nonsense. My boys just got on with the fight as normal. Someone may have thrown a ball or two but I promise you that there was no sport going on."

Wellington Boot In

However, the headmaster of Biscuit College, Mr J.R. McVitie, blamed the incident on his prestigious opponents.

"The Biscuit boys behaved like perfect yobs and stuck to the violence. It was the Cakes boys who got out of hand and tried to start a game," he said.

Late score

St Cakes ..... £94,000 per annum
Biscuit College..... £93,000 per term

Let's Parler Anglais!

(Coming to a classroom near you)

Lesson 94: GCSE French

Teacher: Do you speak French?

Pupil: Yes.

Teacher: Vous avez passé. Next!

"I couldn't taste any difference"

THE NEW DWORKIN BEE

Friday 22 February, 2008

London Mayoral Primaries latest

OBARMY FEVER SWEEPS LONDON AS BORICK CALLS FOR 'CHANGE'

HE NOW looks unstoppable, the charismatic, mop-haired young dynamo who hopes to become the first Turkish Old Etonian to become Mayor of London.

So far, Obarmy's critics have claimed that he is stronger on style than content, and that behind his mantra of "Change" there is a complete vacuum of policies.

But the signs that his recent dramatic new pledge to "get rid of all this crime" has touched a nerve across the capital which could well catapult Borik into the "Red House".

Borick's new slogan for election is to be: "Tough on cripes, tough on the causes of cripes, eh what?"

KEN NOT TO CRACK DOWN ON 'WHISKY GUZZLERS'

THE MAYOR of London, Red-nosed Ken has rejected plans for an "ingestion charge" on London's so-called "whisky guzzlers".

These are the wealthy individuals who insist in filling up their oversize glasses with highly-toxic spirits.

Opponents denounce them as "Four by Fours", after their practice of having four whiskies during breakfast, followed by another four when you are giving a press conference.

The Mayor, however, insists that it would be unfair to penalise people such as himself, who need to guzzle whisky in order "to get through the day."

Mayor Livingstone has ordered aides to prepare a poster campaign with the slogan: "A wee dram afore ye get voted out".

PADDICK DEMANDS SPECIAL CARRIAGES FOR GAY POLICEMEN ON TUBE

Full story: p. 94

"Hang on... I don't think it is a mirage"

Mr Ken Livingstone
Another Apology

IN LAST week's issue a story headlined "Panto To Close" suggested that there was a long-running pantomime called *Nick Whittington*, in which the lovable Mayor's lovable black cat went round filling his Puss-in-Boots with gold.

This was an unfortunate typographical error. The item should of course have been headlined *"Nicked Whittington"*, and gone on to say, *"Nicked Whittington* tells the story of the whisky-loving Mayor who is arrested when the police discover that the streets are no longer paved with gold because he has dug it up and handed it over to his black cat, who has now been given the puss-in-boot (suspended)."

NEXT WEEK: Yet another apology.

MADDY DISAPPEARS

THE MISSING toddler Madeleine McCann has not been seen on the front page of any British newspaper for at least a fortnight.

Portugese police last night said, "It looks like she really has disappeared." *(Reuters)*

MACCA DIVORCE LAWYER SHOCK

"This must be the restaurant to be seen smoking outside of"

LOSS-MAKING GAMBLER 'TO SUE'

A HOPELESS gambler called Alistair Darling, who lost twenty billion pounds of public money betting that he could save Northern Rock, says he hopes to sue those people who allowed him to fritter away the money.

"At first it was just a few billion I lost," said a broken and ashen Darling, "but I kept gambling more and more and soon the losses were out of control. Why didn't Number 10 stop me?"

A spokesman for Number 10 insisted that Darling would get all the help he needed when Ed Balls replaces him as Chancellor in the summer.

Alastair Darling is 34 (days away from being sacked).

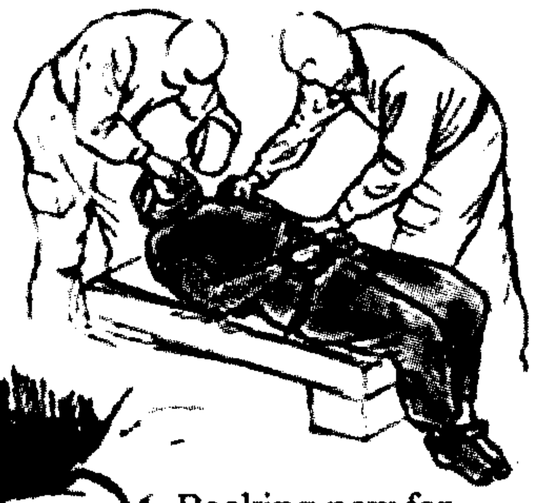
AMY WINEHOUSE WINS FIVE GRAMMIES

Advertisement

Join the craze that's sweeping the U.S.

Come WATERBOARDING this Spring!

Go on holiday & learn some old crafts at the same time!



Booking now for Guantanamo, Kabul, Baghdad, Bangkok & Lakenheath!

*Orange jumpsuits not provided

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY APPROVED

Beijing Olympics

New Record Set

AMERICA's Stephen Spielberg today set a new Olympic record as he ran away from the Chinese Olympics in an astonishing two years.

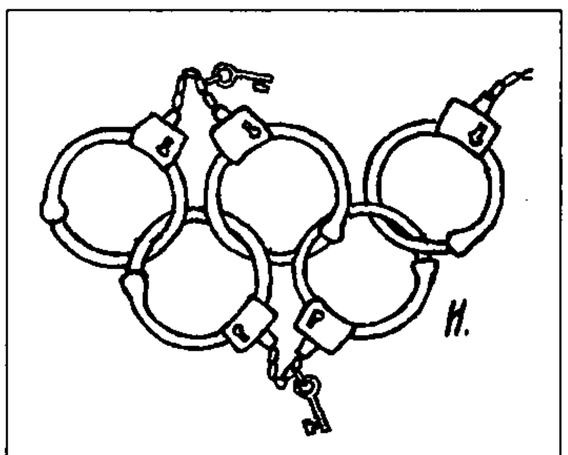
Spielberg's time to realise that the Chinese aren't really very nice was one of the slowest since records began.

Said a Chinese spokesman, "Mr Spielberg was originally happy to take the gold, but when it turned out he was going to get the silver (30 pieces) he decided to run for it."

(Reuters)

That Provisional 2008 British 4x100-metre relay team in full

- ★Dwain Chambers
- ★Amy Winehouse
- ★Kate Moss
- ★Pete Doherty



CHINESE LAUNCH NEW LOGO

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Roy Scheider, Hollywood Actor

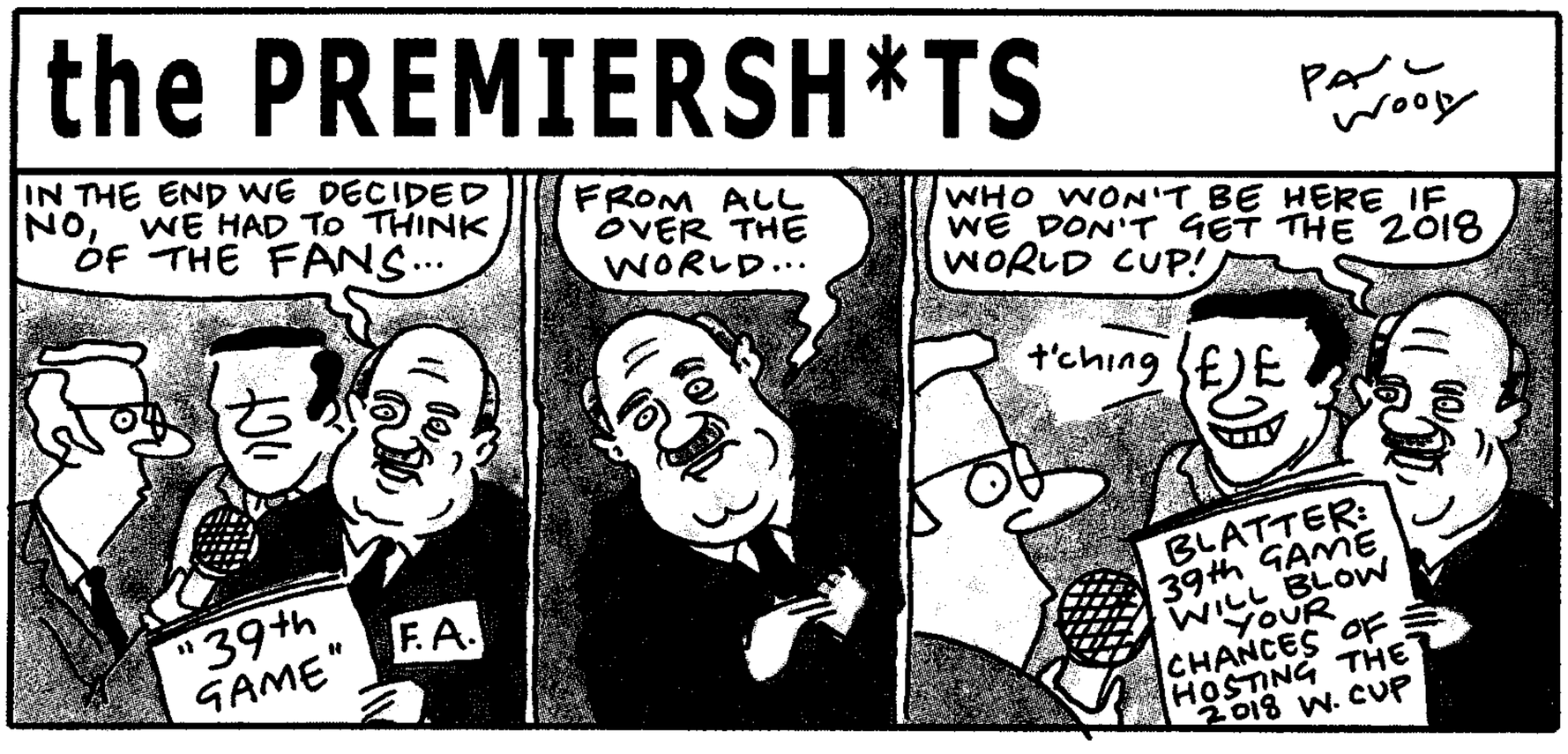
So. Farewell
Then Roy Scheider,
Star of *Jaws.*

"You're gonna need
A bigger boat."
That was your
Catchphrase.

All together now –
Da-dum *(pause)* ♫
Da-dum *(pause)*
Da-dum-da-dum-da-dum...

E. 'Jaws' Thribb (17½)

the PREMIERSH*TS


IN THE END WE DECIDED NO, WE HAD TO THINK OF THE FANS...
"39th GAME"
F.A.
FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD...
WHO WON'T BE HERE IF WE DON'T GET THE 2018 WORLD CUP!
t'ching £ £
BLATTER: 39th GAME WILL BLOW YOUR CHANCES OF HOSTING THE 2018 W. CUP

● Craig Brown's Diary returns next issue ●

Literary Review

Couldn't Carey less

His Illegal Self
Peter Carey
(Faber, £16.99)

LIVING in self-imposed exile in New York seems only to have sharpened Peter Carey's obsession with his native Australia.

Now, whatever the subject matter, whether international art fraud like his last novel, *Theft*, or the radical student politics of this latest fictional foray, he must somehow contrive to shoehorn most of the narrative into some part of the antipodean landscape. The result, in *His Illegal Self*, is a novel that may be good in parts but fails to make sense as a whole.

The story begins in New York. A seven-year-old boy who lives with his wealthy art-collecting grandmother in her Upper East Side apartment is accidentally kidnapped by the woman who is supposed to take him in secret to meet his real mother, a Harvard educated radical chic bank robber and bomb planter. The mother, having lumbered the boy with the right-on name of Che, no longer has custody of him and has not seen him since he was two years old. But their planned "playdate" never takes place.

In a series of overlapping narrative spurts, told partly from the boy's perspective and partly from that of the woman, we piece together what seems to have gone wrong.

The boy thinks the woman who has taken him from his grandmother is really his long unseen mother, Susan, and that their constant movement from one mysterious "safe" location to another, is in order to meet his draftcard-burning father. In fact Susan has accidentally blown herself up in the pursuit of her activism, and the law is now hot on all her associates' heels.

The woman with whom the boy is being shunted from pillar to post, who calls herself "Dial" (short for Dialectic), is an academic who has recently been offered a job at Vassar. Though she once knew the boy and his parents, quite why she allows herself to get mixed up in all this now is mystery that, like much else, is never properly explained. Carey takes advantage of the confusion and inconsistencies in Che's and Dial's overlapping narratives to skate over such awkward questions and instead suddenly plonks them both in Australia, where they end up in a hippy commune in the Queensland rainforest.

There is something of Prospero's island about this locale, and a Caliban-like figure in Trevor, the local resident who takes the new arrivals under his wing, finds them a house and defends them against the other hippies. These at first seem a decidedly unfriendly lot, obsessed with the "rules" of their commune. Trevor himself is obsessed by the idea that they are all under aerial surveillance. He hides their money in a hollow tree trunk (the boy thinks he's stolen it) and turns his house into a survivalist fortress.

But Trevor grew up an orphan (which gives Carey the chance to trot out some rather routine stuff about ghastly brutish priests abusing their poor innocent charges in the bad old days), and he soon discovers and disabuses Che about his own status as an orphan. Che confronts Dial. Dial confronts Trevor. There are yet further confrontations with the other hippies. Gradually they all seem to settle down into some sort of coexistence. But the boy misses his granny and Dial, despite having become quite possessive of him, decides to try to get him home again. Of course, it doesn't quite go according to plan.

As for the book's premise, Carey is not the first contemporary novelist to revisit in recent years the violent radicalism of the late sixties: both Jake Arnott's *Johnny Come Home* and Hari Kunzru's *My Revolutions* deal with the British version (see *Eye* 1194), while several others, including Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*, and Dana Spiotta's *Eat the Document*, deal with the phenomenon in the US. No doubt if there had been a similarly developed Australian version, Carey could have done another of his ventriloquist's monologues about one of its activists. Instead, he's had to co-opt the well-explored American version and yoke it, by hook or by crook, on his own particular Australian pastoral. Like the hippies, it doesn't really wash.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Something to Tell You
Hanif Kureishi
(Faber, £16.99)

Oh *maan*, did I ever tell you about the Seventies? (*Yes. Ed.*) Well, there was this chick called Ajita and we used to go over to her auntie's place in Hounslow and take off all our clothes and lie in the back garden and I'd run my moist, jungly tongue along her sweating... [*continues for several pages*]. Only then she went away and it ruined my life. Really, it did. But anyway, about the Seventies. I mean, politics was really right-on in the Seventies. I was living in this squat in Hammersmith, Shepherd's Bush, somewhere, with these Maoists and Trotskyists and radical types and sometimes we'd go on protest marches and jeer at the pigs, though of course this didn't get in the way of all those crazy times I spent with Ajita round at her dad's house, with the smell of the Vesta beef curries rising from the kitchen, and the way she'd lie there in her auntie's garden and sweetly bid me to explore... [*continues for several more pages*].

Didn't Nietzsche or someone say that "sexual passion is the most perfect manifestation of the will to live?" I mean, how cool is that? Of course, all this time I was worrying about my career, I mean whether I should be a writer or a theatre director or a rock singer, or simply hang out with women... And then of course there was the music. I mean, music was great in the Seventies. There were punks and Goths and hippy flotsam. Maybe there weren't Goths yet, I can't remember, but anyway the music was great. In fact it was almost as good as the drugs which Valentin and the Wolfman and all those brave, estimable people I knew used to score for me in the King's Road after we'd been shoplifting and pissing on the pavement and doing all those things that crazy young cats used to do in the Seventies. Not that the capacity for happiness hadn't left me, you understand, for my life was essentially an exhausted, ground-down, sempiternal twilight. Oh yes it was.

And now I'm a psychoanalyst, which is still pretty cool, don't you think, what with all the sexy stuff my clients tell me, and my friend Henry director and my mad sister Miriam in her crazy house up West. And Rafi my son, well he keeps me in touch with what young people are thinking and saying, yo bruv sho' enuff he do. Which makes me wonder, when he gets to sex, how will he want it? Will he want to be spanked while being fellated by a negro transvestite? I did a murder once, you know, no really I did.

Publisher's Note: Messrs Faber would like to apologise for the fact that, while advertised as a novel, *Something to Tell You* is, like everything else Mr Kureishi has written, merely a projection of his own life, opinions and sexual obsessions. But what can you do?

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ IN AN otherwise admiring review of Nick Davies's *Flat Earth News* for the *Indie*, journalism professor Tim Luckhurst takes serious umbrage at the chapter criticising the *Observer*. "The attack on former *Observer* editor Roger Alton is implausible and mean-spirited. Alton is among the most talented, honest and successful editors of his generation."

Alton will be able to convey his thanks in person when he takes up his new post as an adviser to the journalism department at Kent University – the department headed by Prof Tim Luckhurst.

■ NICHOLAS LEZARD devoted one of his idiosyncratic weekly *Guardian* paperbacks columns last month to praising Katherine Bucknell's novel *What You Will*.

"Its chief strength [is] its luxuriant, almost sensuous appreciation of the intellect – we're almost in Saul Bellow or Iris Murdoch territory here," Lezard gushed.

How funny to read Lady Antonia Fraser's diary in the London *Evening Standard* magazine last week, revealing that she and Lezard had sat next to one another during a soigné dinner party "at the elegant Holland Park house of novelist Katherine Bucknell".

■ THE trouble with magazine editors appointing a plethora of "contributing editors" to add sparkle to their mastheads is that occasionally these drones want to contribute – or there's a temptation to ask them to.

Hence the appearance in the

current *GQ* of a page entirely occupied by a "poem" by Tracey Emin, a contributing editor and also "Feng Shui editor". Entitled "More", it runs in its entirety as follows: "At first I wanted you to fuck me/Then I became greedy/I wanted you to love me./So I asked for more."

Staggeringly, instead of quietly abandoning the experiment, editor Dylan Jones promises in a panel above "More" that the mag will feature "each month, a new Tracey Emin poem". Will other contributing eds follow suit: a Boris Johnson installation, perhaps, or a Rod Liddle dance video?

■ PUBLISHERS beware! Australia's most notorious literary hoaxer and plagiarist has moved to Britain.

Helen Demidenko sprang to fame in 1994 with *The Hand That Signed the Paper*, an anti-semitic "faction" about a peasant from Ukraine who joined the Nazi SS death squads in World War II, allegedly based on her own Ukranian family history. It won most of the major Australian literary awards but also caused great controversy because of its apparent attempt to excuse Nazi war crimes.

Demindenko, who had a habit of appearing at literary events in traditional Ukranian costume, turned out to be Helen Darville, whose parents came to Queensland from, er, Scunthorpe.

Darville's imposture was exposed by the Dirty Digger's *Courier-Mail* in Brisbane, which in true Murdoch style promptly hired her as a columnist – only to sack her soon afterwards following repeated accusations of plagiarism.

Now, the *Eye* learns, she has fetched up at Brasenose College, Oxford, studying for a law degree under yet another moniker, Helen Dale. She is also said to be writing another book...

■ AFTER the Costas, the last more or less serious literary awards looking back to 2007, comes the season for completely silly prizes.

The two awards in question are essentially excuses for writers and/or academic judges to win free long-haul travel and agreeable holidays. The Commonwealth Writers' Prize works World Cup-style through regional heats; but entire regions tend to be embarrassingly dominated by one or two countries – Africa by South Africa and Nigeria (10 of 12); Canada and the Caribbean by Canada (11 of 12); South East Asia and South Pacific by Australia, home of the key sponsor (12 of 12).

The final "region" is absurdly the not noticeably adjacent "Europe and South Asia". Still, all eight regional winners win a week in South Africa's wine country.

Dafter still is the Prince Maurice prize for literary love stories, which allows seeming chairman in perpetuity Tim Lott to invite chums and other clubbable novelists to conduct the judging in a five-star hotel in Mauritius – where the winner can stay for a fortnight. Among Lott's 2008 panel is Irvine Welsh, a connoisseur of luxury hotels and avid log-roller whose influence can perhaps be discerned in the shortlist's inclusion of his pal and Cape stablemate Ewan Morrison (whose "love story" is about wife-swapping) and the fishy presence of three books – no other publisher has more than one – from the small Scottish indy Canongate, to whose collection *Children of Albion Rovers* Welsh and shortlistee James Meek were contributors.

'Bookworm'

REMAINDERS OF THE DAY

■ SPOTTED in Poundland, Swindon... hundreds of copies of *Gordon Brown* by Tom Bower for just £1.

This is even better value than the 84p being charged for the biography on Amazon, which attracts a £2.75 UK delivery charge.

HIGH PRINCIPALS

DARTINGTON College of Art in Devon is one of the top ten places to study art in the UK, according to the *Guardian University Guide 2008*. But for how much longer?

Dartington's attraction is at least partly down to its relatively small size, its beautiful surroundings near Totnes and the artistic community that has grown up there since 1961. But the small Devon-based institution is about to be uprooted and merged into a new university in, er, Cornwall.

Last year an "options report" commissioned from consultants said the college needed to spend a great deal of money to upgrade its site, which it leases from the Dartington Hall Trust. "It is not possible to see how the college could become sustainable at Dartington without a very large donation of capital funds (of the order of £20m) which it is simply unrealistic to expect," said the report (see Music & Musicians, *Eye* 1177).

But if £20m was unrealistic to spruce up such a centre of excellence, why is more than £25m of taxpayer cash now being spent to move the college, lock, stock and paintbrushes, to Falmouth, more than 80 miles away? There it will merge with Falmouth College to form Cornwall University of the Arts.

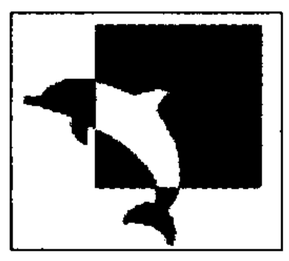
Falmouth is in Cornwall and is thus eligible for £15.6m in European structural funding to set up the new university, even if that means harming another part of the South West. The move will have devastating consequences for Totnes, where the annual influx of students helps keep local services and shops viable. It's estimated the college is worth £4.7m to the local economy.

Last month the South West Regional Development Agency agreed to give a further £3.5m towards the move after stating that the college had been given notice to quit the Dartington Hall estate by 2010 and would therefore have to move. No such notice has been given. The RDA publicly apologised for the mistake; and as the *Eye* went to press it was due to meet to reconsider the funding. Most of the remainder of the money comes from the Higher Education Funding Council.

The Save Dartington College campaign is preparing to have the funding decisions judicially reviewed. Such fundamental mistakes will certainly help its case. Meanwhile Principal Andrew Brewerton says he hopes to export the Dartington "brand" to Falmouth. So that's all right then.

SO. Farewell then to the University of Southampton's jolly dolphin logo, which has been ditched after a £160,000 branding exercise.

Announcing the change, the university said that "the attributes of friendliness and intelligence as represented by the dolphin are still core to the university's identity", but that the 15-year-old logo was too dated. So the obvious solution was to spend a fortune on the university's new dolphin-free visual identity, er, the words "University of Southampton". Dolphin signs on university buildings have already been removed.



Boring old logo

UNIVERSITY OF Southampton

Thrusting new logo

Sometimes it really does get too much. In June, it's the Royal Academy party for 1,400 and I have two children's parties – themed, of course, because I can't help myself – all the end-of-term shows, and the final edit on the new collection. It's brutal.

'A Life in a Day', handbag designer ANYA HINDMARCH,
Sunday Times Magazine

Andrew Roberts, the historian, has two dining rooms, one upstairs and one down, in which to entertain cabinet ministers and presidents from around the world. 'It's tragic they are disappearing' he says.

Daily Telegraph

Pseuds Corner

Beyond a musical happening which appears to 'unite European people' via music, the Eurovision sing contest, both as a spectacle and as a performance event, allegorically represents the idea of 'Europe'. Ever since its early years, the contest has become a symbolic realm for performing European identities and re-making European selves. Singing and dancing Europe enacts an interplay of tropes of being local and/or European, while providing an arena for old and new states to imagine their pasts, portray their presents and envision futures. The politics of representation in Eurovision... may be understood, therefore, in the light of the broader geo-political changes, cultural anxieties and power games defining Europe and the world.

Call for papers for a forthcoming academic conference on 'Singing Europe: Spectacle and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest' to be held in Volos, Greece

The Victorian art critic and theorist Walter Pater wrote that to understand experience, people should think 'not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them.' I feel just so about cover versions...'

LAURA BARTON,
Guardian

How would you describe your style?
Sometimes I go for a real potting-shed look. Or I'm a bit train driverish. I tend to go for authentic brands, but there can be new stuff in there too.

Would it trouble you if your jeans weren't rolled up to the exact width you wanted?
Yes, definitely, they have to be right! I like attention to detail. I like a small roll-up on these jeans because they are slightly tapered – I'm so glad the big Japanese turn-up is gone now... [*continues*]

'Brand strategist' LEE RAMSEY , 'The Close Up', *Guardian*

Contributors: Liz Townsend, Tom Carver, Anonymous academic, Dan McGrew, Richard Dargan.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

EDS will roll

MORE jaw-dropping incompetence from the EDS-led ATLAS consortium that is overhauling all the UK's defence IT.

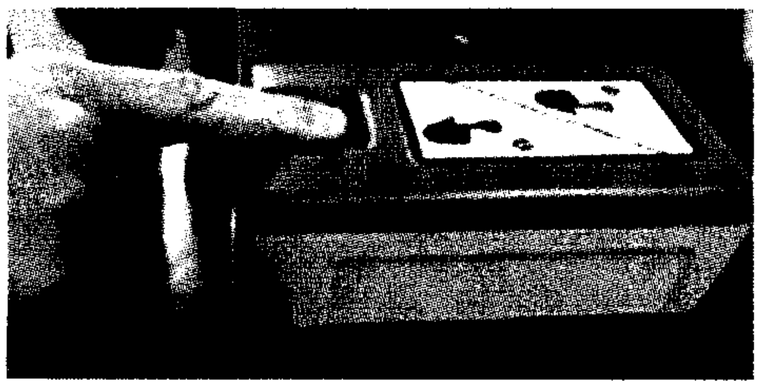
ATLAS was awarded the initial "defence information infrastructure" contract in March 2005 and in December 2006 it was given a second phase worth £4bn without competition, despite having delivered only half the scheduled IT facilities (see *Eye* 1180).

Under the original contract 62,800 IT workstations should have been delivered by 31 July 2007, yet six months later ATLAS has come up with just 22,000. In many places where the new system has been introduced, it has wreaked the usual EDS havoc. As ever, promises the MoD: "Lessons have been learnt from both the MoD and ATLAS perspectives to ensure the process is more effective on future sites." (One lesson that is never learnt is: "Don't employ EDS.")

More mind-blowing still is that this latest EDS fiasco forms part of Gordon Brown's "efficiency" programme, under which he will supposedly save £20bn across Whitehall every year. The minister responsible, Derek Twigg, claims the programme "has delivered the £170m efficiency savings projected... for its first three years". You really could not make it up.

PS: Although EDS bagged a £4bn extension in 2006, it still won't pay the £27m balance on compensation it agreed with the Revenue in 2005 for screwing up the tax credits system, which only became due when it won *new* government contracts.

PPS: The other big EDS defence screw-up is its joint personnel administration (JPA) system, under which all armed forces personnel are now paid. As the *Eye* said three years ago: "Squaddies might want to start checking their payslips a bit more carefully." Soon RAF staff, the first on to the system, had their pay messed up, and figures now released show that in 10 months last year, 12,500 personnel across the services, including those serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, were underpaid because of miscalculations by the JPA system.



Prints of thieves

VILLAINS have been the winners thanks to a government computer cock-up that has been kept quiet by Inspector Knacker and the Home Office because it is so sensitive – the National Fingerprint system.

Since a supposed "upgrade" late last year on "IDENT1", used to identify prints both from unidentified corpses and their killers, not to mention burglars and rapists, the system has been in meltdown. According to one insider, the upgrade seemed to switch IDENT1's brain off.

Overnight a system that holds 13.5m full fingerprints and was making more than 6,000 identifications a month could barely manage a few hundred and was making mistakes.

Internal documents obtained by the *Eye* show that the country's biggest force, the Metropolitan police, had its computers shut down no fewer than 17 times since it was upgraded in early December. Instead of processing the usual 20,000 "marks" in the following month, it was only able to deal with 8,000. At one stage 450 prints from some of the most serious unsolved crimes from around the country – some dating back over a month – had not been processed. "A single ident from this group could have had serious repercussions," said the report.

Even postmortem prints from John Does were going unchecked. After just a month of chaos, the Yard had a massive backlog of cases expected to take more than 8,000 man hours to clear.

Users of the system remember fondly the old National Automated Fingerprint Identification Service (NAFIS), which used to work wonderfully. A spokeswoman for the National Police Improvement Agency, which introduced IDENT1 as part of its "drive towards formulating codes of best practice for government use of biometrics, such as facial imaging, and iris technology", said it was now "running as it should be".

Those eCock-ups in full

GOOD to see the prime minister recording a message of congratulation for the recent "e-government" national awards for 400 civil servants at the Dorchester.

Once-prudent Gordon commended an industry that he was proud to announce swallows £10bn of taxpayers' cash every year "for your initiative, your drive and your commitment to providing the public with the very best".

Whoops! Among the winners were:

- The over-budget and late £230m MOT computerisation project which the transport select committee called a "qualified failure".
- UKvisas, which triumphed for a "web-enabled biometric visa regime" that the information commissioner has criticised for breaching the data protection act.

Not even Brown would find much to recommend plans for computerising house moving under the Land Registry's "e-conveyancing" project. It took more than five years to set up a pilot scheme for just a basic online progress tracking system, and the full e-conveyancing system, which was to be compulsory by "2009 or 2010", will now be "fully implemented in 2014-15", promises justice minister Michael Wills.

On the subject of IT awards, it was fitting that in the week the 2007 Excellence in Civil Service Award for technology was presented to the Legal Services Commission, its "LSC online" system should go, er, off-line. Two months on it's still not working.

Far from "building excellent relations with their partners", as the judges claimed, the computer failure has left legal aid solicitors and not-for profit agencies, frustrated and angry. It seems the original version of LSC online worked fine as a simple billing service. Things went wrong when the LSC sought to expand it to carry out management functions, including data sharing. The LSC said the coveted award was for the original version of LSC online. Shame it is now obsolete.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£10bn Annual government spending on IT projects

£10bn Annual tax rises required to deal with Britain's current budget deficit

TAX

Dodge City

WITH fortunes lost every year to the most expensive but best-hidden public finance scandal of all – corporate tax dodging – MPs on the public accounts committee are finally taking an interest. But will they be any more effective at doing something about it than Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)?

HMRC refuses even to release estimates of losses to tax avoidance by large companies, despite having been told to by the information commissioner following a request from the *Eye*. The figure is known to be in the tens of billions (small firms dodge £5bn a year). Of this tax, investigations recover just a small fraction, around £2bn to £3bn. Faced with the missing billions, HMRC still assumes that "the majority of businesses want to pay the right amount of tax at the right time". When MPs asked for the evidence, however, HMRC boss Dave Hartnett simply couldn't provide it.

Such misguided faith in big business means only a few hundred tax inspectors, whose investigations recover 100 times their costs, are left to address the shortfall – leaving them comprehensively out-numbered by lawyers and bean-counters who are busy dreaming up new scams.

As one far-sighted shadow minister once remarked when criticising Tory cuts many years ago: "The Government need... adequately to resource the Inland Revenue... a little extra investment may reap substantial rewards. Certainly we think that it would be more fruitful to explore that area than to spend the money hounding poor people on social security."

The well-informed MP? A certain G. Brown.

Credit crunch

THE latest investigation into Gordon Brown's tax credits fiasco has found that cock-ups and criminals are still costing taxpayers a staggering £1bn a year.

The Commons public accounts committee (PAC) last week condemned HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) for failing to deal with errors and fraud that have blighted the child and working tax credit system since it was introduced in 2003.

Still reeling from criticism of "endemic incompetence" following the lost data disc saga and last month's collapse of the online tax return filing system, HMRC tried to deflect the MPs' latest attack. It said the accounts committee was basing its report on 2006 data, since when overpayments had fallen by a fifth and accuracy in processing payment had reached 97 percent.

Really? *Eye* readers who continue to suffer are not convinced. Tina Hammond, from Ipswich, thought she was shot of her £332 child tax credit overpayment problems back in August 2005, when she finally received a letter saying the payment "arose from an error on our part so you will not be asked to pay it back. We are sorry for our mistake..."

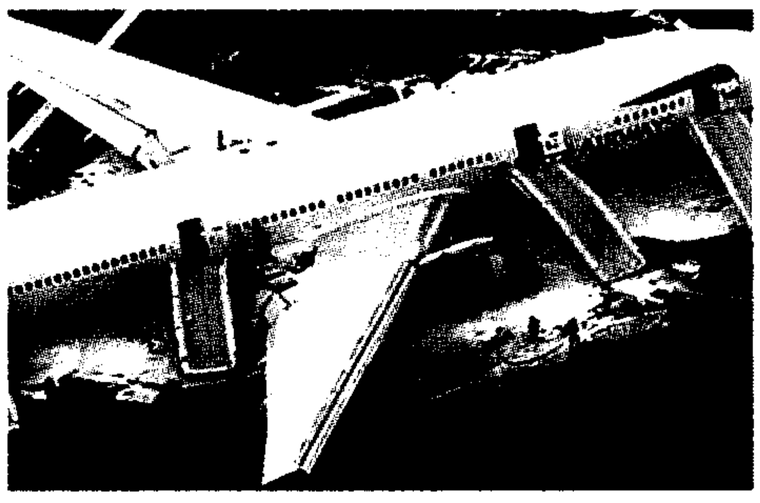
The letter even offered to repay the sum if it had already been recovered from her.

The mother of one heard no more for 18 months but then took a phone call from an HMRC employee who said she wanted to discuss the overpayment. The woman demanded Ms Hammond's name, address, date of birth and insurance number "in order to confirm the right person was on the end of the line". Naturally, Ms Hammond declined to give such information over the telephone, telling the caller that the matter had been dealt with but adding that if HMRC had any further queries it should put them in writing.

Once again that appeared to be the end of the matter – until two weeks ago when she received a letter from the Tax Credit Overpayment Unit, demanding she pay back the money or face possible court action!

BOEING 777 CRASH

A software triple whammy



AIR accident investigators have provisionally identified the cause of last month's British Airways Boeing 777 crash at Heathrow as a failure by both engines to provide the necessary thrust of power ahead of landing, causing it to fall short of the runway.

Why both engines should fail to respond to demands from the "auto-throttle" and then from the two pilots is not yet known, but investigators are looking closely at the craft's computer systems. And so they should: aircraft and computer experts warned long ago of a potentially dangerous flaw in the software driving the 400-seater's three primary flight computers (PFCs).

Until the revolutionary 777 (dubbed the "computer with wings"), every passenger jet had a failsafe "triplex" system of PFCs - three computers from three different companies with three different teams writing the software. One computer would fly the aircraft, one would monitor and take over if a problem occurred and the third would be in reserve. A mistake in one was very unlikely to be in the second and even more unlikely in the third. Thus safety in a craft that was to take autopilot to a new level was all but guaranteed.

So it was – at first – with the 777. Boeing took its proposals for a triplex PFC system to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which gave approval. But then things started to unravel. Without putting the software programme out to competitive tender, Boeing appointed GEC Marconi, based in Rochester, Kent, as sole writer. GEC had three different teams of software writers, separated by "Chinese walls".

According to Boeing itself, however: "It became apparent that the three separate teams were having to ask Boeing so many questions for clarification that the independence of the three teams was irreparably compromised."

So instead of hiring new teams, which would have delayed the project and may have rendered Boeing liable for penalty payments, the three teams became one. Triplex was forgotten.

The result was 132,000 lines of software code, unprecedented in aviation history, which, it seems, could not be independently checked. The then chairman of the British Computer Society's safety critical systems taskforce, Professor Brian Wichmann, told *Computer Weekly* magazine (which revealed the potential flaw back in 1995) that "more than 20,000 lines of code are too complex to test" and that 132,000 lines of code were impossible to verify. If a bug or glitch caused a failure during a take-off or landing, the plane could crash before the pilot had time to react.

But the system was approved, not by the FAA or the British Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), but by the European Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA) based in Holland – by just three JAA specialists.

As the certifying authority in America, the FAA asked for more comprehensive software audits but then accepted Boeing's argument that the lines of code had already been tested and verified so extensively that any potential for error had been ruled out.

Mary Schiavo, the former director-general at the US Department of Transportation, revealed in her book *Flying Blind Flying Safe* that the FAA's national software expert later admitted to her: "I'm in a very embarrassing position. To say the software is safe, I can't tell you that. I can tell you that the software development has followed our procedures." So that's all right, then.

Air accident investigators say they are focusing on a more detailed analysis of the flight recorder information and examining system modules and equipment that could influence engine operation.

JAIL OVERCROWDING

Locked in talks

WHEN Phil Wheatley, director-general of the Prison Service, addressed its annual conference on the major challenges facing the service "today", the jail governor delegates didn't think he meant it literally.

But he did. And all the governors present were told to get on their mobile phones and identify as many inmates in their jails as possible who were considered of sufficiently low risk to move immediately to open jails. It seems the prison overcrowding problem had hit crisis point: the jails were 200 inmates away from bust.

With judges and magistrates in some areas such as Staffordshire unable to give non-custodial sentences because there is neither the money nor staff to supervise community penalties, they were packing the jails to record numbers.

The conference was interrupted as Justice Secretary Jack Straw and the prison service chiefs disappeared into a side meeting. Their plan was to put pressure on Inspector Knacker to house up to 400 inmates in police cells. When the conference resumed, delegates were assured that the pressure would ease in the coming days as it was school half-term… and magistrates and judges would be off with their children and unable to lock up criminals! Crisis management indeed.

NOMS away

AS IF he didn't have enough problems at the Prison Service, Phil Wheatley has also been given the job of yet another re-organisation of prisons and probation.

The prison chief is to take over the troubled National Offender Management Service, cobbled together four years ago to provide "joined up" offender management from sentence at court through prison and on to release. But with prisons and probation both in crisis, NOMS stands accused of achieving little for its £1.5bn of taxpayers' money other than an over-bureaucratic headquarters, a useless IT system and wasting lots of money on consultants.

NAPO, the probation union, points out that before NOMS was created the service was managed by about 20 staff. By the end of 2007 there were hundreds employed in what NOMS called "probation-facing units", with equally unfathomable names and functions such as the "Attitude, Thinking and Behaviour team" and the "Prospects Unit", while frontline staff were stretched to the limit.

Among staff Wheatley is credited with protecting the Prison Service from the worst of NOMS's meddling, and he is now widely expected to strip it down.

GOODBYE, SAILOR

Style vs. content

VICE-ADMIRAL Charles Style was installed last month as the new commandant of the Royal College of Defence Studies. It's a plum London post, much sought after by service chiefs who fancy serving their last few years before retirement in the college's handsome stuccoed mansion in Belgrave Square, and it usually rotates between the different services. But the last commandant was an admiral as well. Shome mishtake, shurely?

Thereby hangs a tale which top brass at the MoD have been striving to suppress: that Style was effectively sacked after only 18 months in his previous job as Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Commitments), where he was responsible for supervising British operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. When the *Sunday Mirror* got wind of the story last year, it was told by the MoD that "Vice-Admiral Style has not been sacked." But he had.

Style's troubles began in the spring of 2006 with the arrival of a new chief of defence staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup – a former single-seater fighter pilot and a stickler for detail. As British troops started taking casualties in Helmand province (despite the then defence secretary John Reid's blithe aspiration that they would leave "without a single shot being fired") Stirrup became infuriated by his Old Etonian deputy's inability to supply urgent, thorough assessments of operational requirements.

MoD officials, watching the defence chiefs' weekly meetings via video link-up, witnessed Stirrup's impatience as Style had to be regularly corrected by his military assistants, first Lt Col James Swift and then Lt Col Rupert Jones. During a discussion of Afghanistan, Style referred to "this battle group here" – whereupon the aide had to explain "that battle group's actually in Basra, sir". "Ah yes, of course." When he announced that "of course we'll now be reducing [troop numbers] to this ceiling", Stirrup interrupted: "No, Charles, that's Iraq. We're talking about Afghanistan." (An MoD source assures the *Eye* that Style "did know the difference between Iraq and Afghanistan but he got the details muddled".) Brigadier Ed Butler, one of the first commanders in Helmand, had to resort to speaking directly to Stirrup to ensure he understood the situation on the ground.

By last spring Sir Jock Stirrup had had enough. He summoned Style to his office and said he wanted him out. "I'm fucked," the admiral told his aides, asking them to clear his desk and cancel his engagements. Two days later, however, the diary engagements were reinstated and it was business as usual. In the meantime, it seems, Style had taken legal advice – as had the MoD. Admiral Sir Jonathon Band, the First Sea Lord (and the man who originally recommended Style for the job), warned defence chiefs that they hadn't followed correct procedures.

So a face-saving deal was brokered by the vice-chief, General Sir Timothy Granville-Chapman. Style would be sent on six months' fully-paid leave (on his £120,000 salary) from August 2007, after which he would slide seamlessly into the Royal College of Defence Studies as the MoD's "preferred candidate". Meanwhile Sir Jock Stirrup would get the deputy he wanted, the widely respected Lt General Peter Wall.

The ministry assures the *Eye* that Style's six-month break was "no more nor less than any serviceman gets" – three weeks' summer leave followed by seven weeks' "resettlement training", followed by 28 days' "terminal leave", Christmas leave and so on. It also continues to deny that he was forced out. However, one spokesman did concede: "There's no secret that he didn't entirely rub along well with some people in the building…"

There's also no secret that the MoD is terrified of the story getting out. When the *Eye* started making inquiries last week, Stirrup immediately convened a "crisis meeting" to discuss how to limit the damage. Too late, alas…

In the Back continues overleaf ➤

Eye told you so

THE full ramifications of the *Eye* story broken by "Ratbiter" in December (issue 1200) about Thames Valley police's bizarrely aggressive treatment of the *Milton Keynes Citizen*'s crime correspondent are only now becoming clear.

As *Eye* readers will recall, anti-corruption officers bugged the phone of respected reporter Sally Murrer and recorded hours of her conversations with local police officer Det Sgt Mark Kearney (pictured) – subsequently revealed as the officer at the heart of the Sadiq Khan bugging inquiry (see article below).

They raided Murrer's home and the *Citizen*'s offices. Twice they interrogated her – once after leaving her for 30 hours in a police cell; the second time after softening her up with a strip search. Now Murrer and Kearney (who were once lovers), along with Kearney's son Harry and Derek Webb, a private detective, face the obscure common law charge of "aiding and abetting gross misconduct in a public office".

So what's going on? The police seemed to think Murrer was a cheque-book journalist who bribed officers to sell her stories. But the *Milton Keynes Citizen* doesn't do cheque-book journalism: it can barely afford to pay parish correspondents 12p a line for their reports of church fetes.

Stranger still, after the police went through Murrer's and Kearney's bank accounts, they accepted that no money had changed hands. All they now allege is that, like journalists and their contacts do every day, Kearney *told* her stories about a local footballer and drug dealer that didn't come within a thousand miles of breaking the official secrets act.

Ordinarily, this nasty tale of oppressive policing wouldn't have wider consequences. But with a gratifying poetic justice rarely encountered outside Hollywood movies, Thames Valley police must now answer for inadvertently letting loose havoc in Whitehall, infuriating MI5 and forcing a shaken justice secretary Jack Straw to the despatch box.

Mark Kearney had a nervous breakdown after his arrest. His mental state wasn't helped by the police upping the pressure on him by also arresting his son. In a statement to the police professional standards department, he explained why he couldn't go to Milton Keynes station, saying he wasn't only worried about going to prison with his son but feared he may have broken the law when he succumbed to pressure from the Met police to bug a meeting in Woodhill Prison between Labour MP Sadiq Khan and prisoner Babar Ahmad, who is fighting extradition to the US on terrorist charges.

Neither police nor the crown prosecution service (CPS) has accused Kearney of leaking details of the bugging. (Kearney himself denies it – not least because the disclosure has made him a target for Islamists.) But his statement did the rounds in Milton Keynes. Lawyers and uniformed officers read it, and wives and partners of the suspects, furious that their homes had been ransacked, stormed to their MPs and councillors and told them everything they knew. No one will say how he found out, but within weeks of Kearney writing his statement, David Davis, shadow home secretary, privately asked Gordon Brown about the bugging of MPs and lawyers. Brown didn't reply; and a few weeks later, the story was all over the papers.

If Sara Thornton, chief constable of Thames Valley, thinks she is going to have a hard time explaining to ministers how an hysterically disproportionate operation against a local journalist triggered a national scandal, she should look at the press bench at Murrer's pre-trial hearings and realise that her life is only going to get worse. Normally hacks don't bother to cover arcane legal discussions about procedure, but the court was packed for Murrer's five-minute hearing on 11 February. This one will run and run.

'Ratbiter'

Operation whitewash

GIVEN only two weeks to investigate the controversial bugging of Muslim Labour MP and human rights lawyer Sadiq Khan (pictured left), one would have thought that Sir Christopher Rose, the chief surveillance commissioner, would have beaten a hasty path to St George's army barracks in Bicester, Oxfordshire.

Why? Because there, inside a secret storage facility, lies all the paperwork and the hundreds of covert tape recordings at the centre of the controversy, revealing exactly who knew what about the eavesdropping operation at Woodhill prison.

As the deadline imposed by Justice Secretary Jack Straw approached, however, not only were the boxes and their contents undisturbed, but no one from Rose's team had been near Mark Kearney, the Thames Valley police intelligence officer, who reluctantly carried out the bugging (see article above).

Given the tight deadlines, limited scope and the secondment of an officer from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to lead the Rose investigation, the inquiry already smells of whitewash. For ACPO, too, is caught up in the scandal. Kearney attended meetings of the ACPO prison intelligence working group; and a Special Branch detective superintendent attached to it thanked the reluctant officer for bugging the MP.

Of course when the story first broke, Inspector Knacker started privately "briefing" hacks that no one knew that Khan was a MP when he visited his constituent, Babar Ahmad (pictured right), who is fighting extradition to the US. But this is not true. Within weeks of Ahmad's transfer to Woodhill in August 2004, Scotland Yard authorised the bugging of all his non-legal visits and phone calls. Kearney's prison intelligence unit was in regular contact with the Met's Special Branch prison liaison team, who later became more discerning about which specific visits should be bugged as part of Operation Quarrier.

The *Eye* has learned that the Rose inquiry has been given the names of two Special Branch detective constables who, it is alleged, instructed Kearney specifically to bug Khan's visits, knowing that he was an MP. Kearney ensured that Ahmad was seated at "talking tables" G2 (in May 2005) and F2 (in June 2006) when Khan visited.

Under security procedures agreed by Rose's predecessor as the "interception of communications commissioner", Sir Swinton Thomas, only the Met's anti-terrorist and Special Branch officers were allowed to take away copies of the tapes, from which transcripts were made and analysed. Hundreds of Ahmad's conversations were bugged over the three years he spent on remand at Woodhill. Many of these conversations contained sensitive information about his appeal against extradition and a civil case he was bringing against the Met for assault, which his lawyers will now argue is a breach of legal privilege by the back door.

The Met, of course, has form in this area. *Eye* readers will remember that in December 2006, commissioner Sir Ian Blair was found guilty of overseeing the unlawful bugging of phone conversations of Muslim detective superintendent Ali Dizaei, the legal adviser to the National Black Police Association (NBPA). And who was Dizaei and NBPA's solicitor? None other than Sadiq Khan!

FOLLOW-UPS...FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

■ DEPORTATION DECISION: Good news for Manchester social carer Perparim Demaj and his family who have at last been given permission to stay in the UK and work, after a four-year battle with the Home Office (*Eye* 1187). Manchester city council held open his job supporting with people with HIV/Aids and has fought to be allowed to keep Mr Demaj, at a time when it had to recruit social workers from abroad.

Mr Demaj fled from Kosovo in 1998 and came to the UK as part of the humanitarian evacuation of refugees. He learned English, trained in social care and won praise from his bosses. But in 2004 the Home Office withdrew his right to work and has been threatening to deport him, his wife Albana and their three children ever since.

"These have been very long years of uncertainty. Many times I was in total despair," said Mr Demaj, who thanked all the campaigners who have written letters and petitions on his behalf.

■ BIG SCIENCE: "I want more science in action in the classroom, more flash-bang to enthuse the budding scientists," so said schools minister Jim Knight when announcing £140m was to be spent on halting the declining number of physics graduates.

"Britain has a great tradition for producing world-class scientists and engineers and I want to not only maintain but to enhance that," he added.

Certainly something has to be done, as the latest figures show that applications for postgraduate teacher training in physics have dropped by 30 percent this year. But surely what really inspires young wannabe physicists is the prospect of getting involved in cutting-edge research? Yet thanks to the £80m shortfall in the Science and Technology Funding Council budget, the UK's participation in such work is being severely curtailed, including pulling out of the International Linear Collider and the Gemini telescopes.

Ah well, they can always become stockbrokers. "Many particle physicists have found careers in the City, not doing particle physics but using their skills to be able to apply them in particular areas," said Professor Ian Diamond, chairman of Research Councils UK, when asked by the innovation, universities and skills select committee what physicists could do if their jobs ceased to exist.

In the City

ONE factor that probably influenced Gordon Brown's decision to make his stooge Alistair Darling do the right if unwanted thing over Northern Wreck was the fear that any deal with Virgin could be delayed, if not derailed, by the bank's shareholders. Virgin was the only alternative to a £110bn nationalisation.

Another reason could have been the suspicion that the bank would (like Virgin Rail) turn into a winner for Richard Branson and a loser for the taxpayer and Labour, especially if it proved impossible to repay the £25bn Bank of England loans on time in three years. Selling the bond issue, upon which repayment largely depended, was also problematic. given its scale and the fragility of global markets.

Also, Branson may have overplayed his hand, thinking that, after Olivant dropped out and the management bid was rejected, Darling had nowhere else to go if he wanted to avoid nationalisation. But it seems that in the end the Treasury persuaded Brown that further enriching a grinning Branson would look worse than using the hated N-word, which Chancellor Darling accepted only in November represented job losses in a Labour heartland and a "slow, lingering death" for Northern Wreck.

There will be lots of understandable sound and fury from 180,000 small shareholders. They still appear oblivious to the fact that without up to £55bn in loans and guarantees from the taxpayer their bank is bust and its shares worthless; they did not even sell when they had the chance at prices of up to 120p in the past three months.

However, any serious legal threat is most likely to be led by one of the two hedge funds who have built up a stake of over 18 percent since Northern Wreck went cap in hand to the government last September.

The biggest stake – 11.5 percent or over 48 million shares – has been aggressively acquired by Jon Wood's Monaco-based SRM Global. This was worth almost £44m last Friday before the plug was pulled on the shares at 90p.

SRM is bottom fishing not just at Northern Wreck but also at Countrywide Financial, one of the major builders of the sub-prime bomb in the United States, where it is trying to force rescuers Bank of America to pay more.

Despite the growing risk of nationalisation, Wood still added 3m Northern Wreck shares last week; he may well have spent up to £70m of clients' money building that stake. Much of this holding was acquired when the shares were between 200p and 300p but could now be worth next to nothing. Wood has been insisting that any nationalisation should reflect the bank's "book value", which he puts at over 400p a share. But then he would, wouldn't he?

The Treasury made it clear last month that it would base any compensation to shareholders on the assumption that all £55bn of support was withdrawn – which suggests only a nominal payment, if any at all. In other words, the value in administration, as Northern Wreck would be unable to refinance the taxpayer's support and so would collapse.

The second large shareholder is RAB Capital, which bought just under 7 percent, or 28m shares, mostly last September. This stake was worth £25m last Friday but could have cost more than £50m.

RAB is run by Philip Richards in London but the Special Situations Master Fund, which holds the stake, is based in the Cayman Islands tax haven. One of the largest investors in both RAB and the fund is major Labour donor and prominent "non-dom" steel billionaire Lakshmi Mittal.

Although SRM and RAB have been working together to thwart Branson or nationalization, the lead has been taken by Wood, who has been the most vociferous in threatening to block any Virgin deal that would require shareholders' support or to sue the government for compensation. Public interest and hedge fund are far from synonymous – and this is particularly true in the case of Wood, branded a "hard and calculating" liar by a High Court judge little more than two years ago.

Mr Justice Warren depicted the would-be saviour of Northern Wreck shareholders as a man prepared to say anything to get what he wanted. It was previously claimed that the driven Wood had already forced the Takeover Panel to change its rules as a result of tactics used when at SBC Warburg.

The Swiss-based Wood, then a managing director and the star trader at bankers UBS, whom he left to form SRM in 2006, gave evidence in a dispute between his partner Peter Wilkinson and Scotland's richest man Sir Tom Hunter and others over an investment deal gone sour. This concerned the Gadget Shop retail chain, in which they all invested, and a claimed proposed merger with the Birthdays greetings card shops. Hunter and his partners bought Birthdays in 2003; Gadget Shop collapsed in 2005. Wilkinson and Wood claimed they had suffered "unfair prejudice". Hunter denied their claims.

Giving judgment against Wilkinson in December 2005, Mr Justice Warren – who had already declared during the ill-tempered proceedings: "One side is lying rather than being mistaken" – said of Wood, who had provided a witness statement and testified in court: "I found Mr Wood an unreliable witness. As will be seen from the detailed consideration of many aspects of his evidence, I do not consider that he is being honest in everything he says. I found him evasive in the witness box. I found his ability to remember matters favourable to him but not those unfavourable surprising. He came across as a very hard and calculating man, albeit attempting to present himself in a much softer way. Where his evidence differs from those of other witnesses, I prefer theirs."

The judge said that "unhappiness" about Gadget Shop "has coloured Mr Wood's attitude to Sir Tom… and has led to his becoming more and more hostile as time passed by, seeing in every move by them a conspiracy to water down his shareholding yet further. This is hardly a balanced view of a purely commercial relationship."

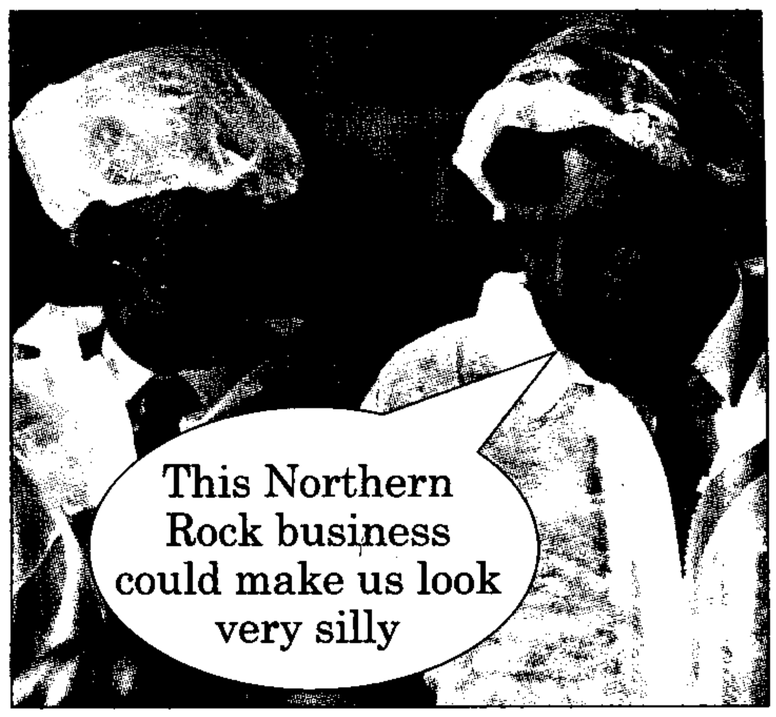
Warren said that he believed Wood's "attitude and animus is driving the campaign of attrition which is this litigation". He described emails from Wood to Wilkinson as "intemperate and abusive".

The judge rejected specific evidence from Wood, some of which he described as "preposterous". On other occasions he was even more critical: "I am afraid that I consider Mr Wood to be making up what he says."

On the question of the money they had lost from the Birthdays deal, the judge stated: "Mr Wood, in cross-examination, put forward the proposition that the combined business was worth £200m-£300m in August 2003; that was the figure which he thought that a valuer would put on the shares for the purposes of ascertaining the price if a buy-out order were to be made against Sir Tom… It is, however, a preposterous proposition, if it is based only on what has been put in evidence in this case."

Words that may be relevant today to Northern Wreck.

NATIONALISATION LATEST



A POSSIBLE shareholders' legal action is just one of the costs of Brown and Darling's dithering over Northern Wreck.

The taxpayer will now have to pick up the multimillion-pound costs of all the bank's advisers, such as Blackstone, Merrill Lynch and Citigroup together with assorted lawyers such as Allen & Overy and Freshfields, plus accountants PricewaterhouseCoopers, who have been on the case since September. This will no doubt also include the costs of the failed management buy-out.

Then there are the generous fees to be paid to Goldman Sachs for advising the Treasury on the bond scheme. Finally, there could be the costs of all the would-be bidders if it is held that they should be compensated for taking part in an auction arranged and then terminated by the government.

All this spending could have been avoided if Brown had not been so determined not to make what always appeared the best move in order to protect taxpayers – his supposed main aim. But those numbers shrink into insignificance in comparison with the £25bn pumped into Northern Wreck by the Bank of England.

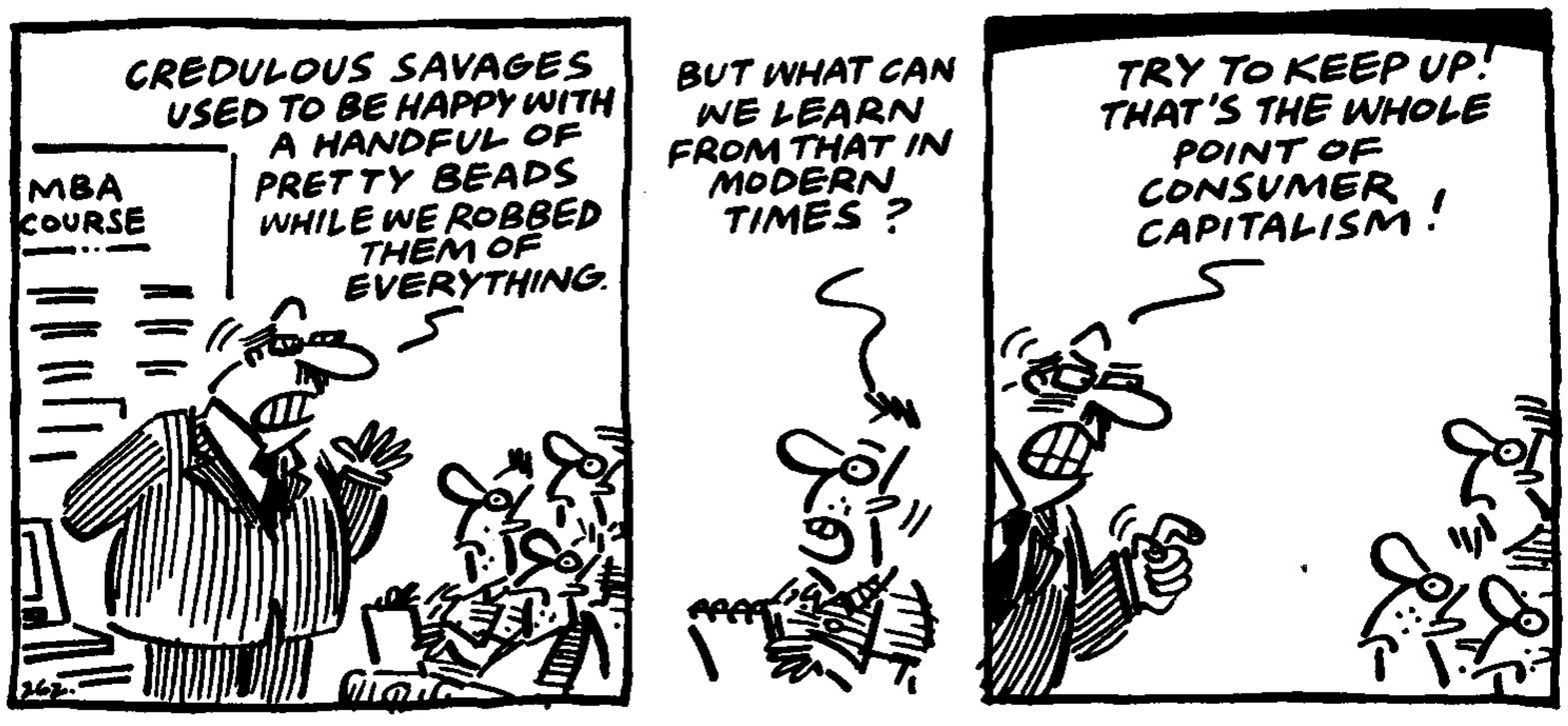
Had a decision been taken to nationalise the bank in September, most of this would have been unnecessary – because there would have been no run by depositors or lenders. Now the taxpayer will have to wait three or more years to get all this money back, if it ever does. Meanwhile, all those professional advisers will be sending out their bills with big smiles before moving on to the next bonus opportunity.

Which makes even more bizarre the rejection of a possible rescue bid from Lloyds TSB because the Treasury was not prepared to provide a £30bn facility – not a loan as has happened - on commercial terms! Bravo, Brown and Darling.

☛ *See over...*

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG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MBA COURSE
BUT WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THAT IN MODERN TIMES?
TRY TO KEEP UP! THAT'S THE WHOLE POINT OF CONSUMER CAPITALISM!

THE Department of You Can't Make It Up. The new finance director of the nationalised Northern Wreck will be Ann Godbehere – a sentiment no doubt now divinely to be wished by the bank's staff and shareholders.

LAWYER David Mills, aka the estranged Mr Tessa Jowell, may receive some bad news soon.

The Milan magistrates pursuing the case against him and media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi for allegedly perverting the course of justice, over an alleged $600,000 bribe from his long-time client for favourable testimony during two Nineties trials, are rumoured to have obtained an extension of the time available to complete the legal process including trial and appeals. The 10-year statute of limitations – after which prosecutions automatically lapse – was expected to run out this month with the trial still unfinished. It only began last March, although the bribery was said to have happened in February 1998. But now it seems the time limit may have been extended by up to two years.

However, any extension may prove irrelevant if, as seems probable, Berlusconi returns to power with the fall of the Prodi government last month. If he becomes prime minister in April, Berlusconi is likely to ensure that the Mills case goes the way of all the other corruption prosecutions he has faced – nowhere.

It was Berlusconi who reduced the statute from 15 to 10 years after he first become prime minister. But then he has always denied making any payment to Mills, whose version of these events has wavered rather more. The only "evidence" is a 2004 letter Mills wrote to his accountant making admissions that he has since denied.

THE imminent introduction in April of a £30,000 annual fee for "non-doms" living in Britain will raise yet another interesting question over the tax affairs of the biggest Tory donor, Lord Michael Ashcroft.

The fee will be payable by those who have been resident here for seven years or more. It is almost eight years since Ashcroft finally received his peerage and subsequently declared that he would be paying UK tax. Whether he is still paying and how much is the issue.

If Tory leader David Cameron wants to clarify Ashcroft's tax status, presumably one question he could ask is whether the billionaire is paying the £30,000 or not. Of course, as the *Eye* has made clear before, most recently in *Eye* 1198, Ashcroft could be resident or even ordinarily resident for UK tax purposes and still be domiciled elsewhere, such as Belize. And, though resident, he would still only pay UK tax on any income he received in or remitted to Britain or any benefits, such as from living in an offshore owned home.

But all that could legally be minimal and what Ashcroft wants it to be. Any capital remitted would be UK tax-free, and so would his worldwide income and any offshore trusts – especially after the climb-down by Chancellor Darling about the extent of the new rules for "non-doms" in the face of City outrage. So Ashcroft business as usual, while Cameron can be portrayed as getting tough with Lord Moneybags of Belize by supporting a bill to make peers UK tax residents. No wonder the relaxed response from the Ashcroft camp to Cameron getting tough was: "It will have no effect on him".

'Slicker'

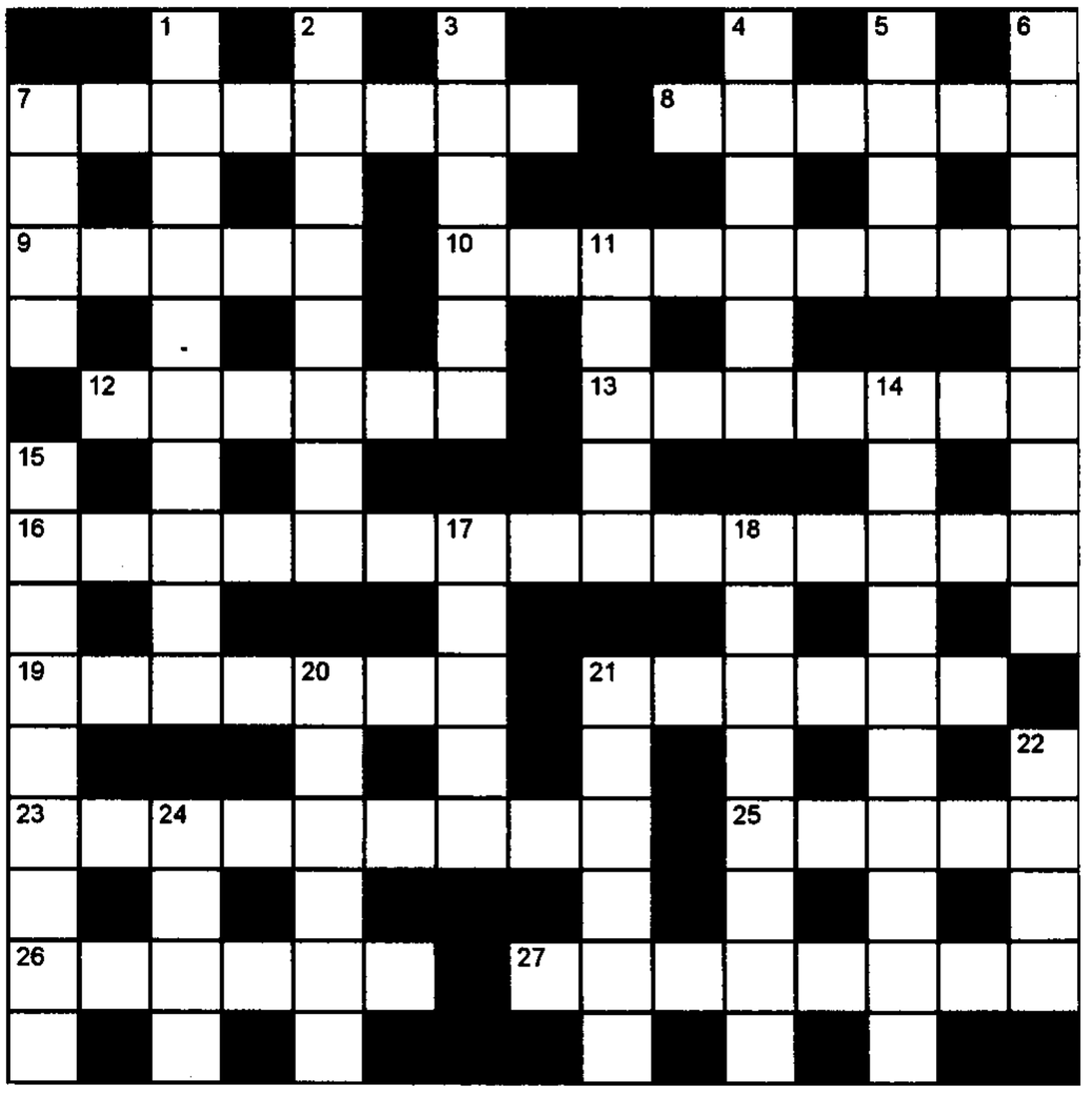
NUMBER CRUNCHING

40 Percentage of jobs new management team led by Ron Sandler plans to shed at Northern Rock

40 Number of Northern Rock employees whose salaries could be paid out of the £1,080,000 per annum that is being paid to Ron Sandler

EYE CROSSWORD 359

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 29 February 2008

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

7 Nothing on top, like a couple of old Henry's mates (8)

8 Short girl sporting long tongue (6)

9 Swim like a piss-artist (5)

10 Beefy into S and M? (9)

12 True novel by Private Eye: *Labour Started Here* (6)

13 Joint certain terrorists often chose for getting smashed? (7)

16/26 Disproportionate gratitude expressed by one fingering a rigid male model? (5,10,6)

19 Paisley's heart is in rows over Assembly (7)

21 Dick, as you might coyly say, having to pull off ring, had breakdown (6)

23 Decorative model, in an assured way, gobbles sailors on date (4,5)

25 Drunken writer didn't catch that in bar (5)

26 See 16ac.

27 See 15dn.

DOWN

1 An easy piece takes rod in mouth and cheeks (10)

2 Drug-taking party leader finally shows hand (8)

3 Almost sounds like editors count! (6)

4 See 14dn.

5 Hideous, being given 'oral' treatment in the fruit store? (4)

6 Chauvinist's "droop and wobble" (9)

7 Stiff? Wow, get daughter inside! (4)

11 City backs piss money (5)

14/4 Suffering castration, help around house, in a stew (10,6)

15/27 A more dire situation for a NHS patient possibly couldn't be imagined? (5-4,8)

17 By which to barge around like an arsehole (5)

18 Cruise, having erection, moving right to second position – it's blown (8)

20 Clue: Di unstable, a rather fanciful dictator (2,4)

21 Could be used to put a luvvy into obscurity! (3,3)

22 Start removing clothes as an old seducer would do? (4)

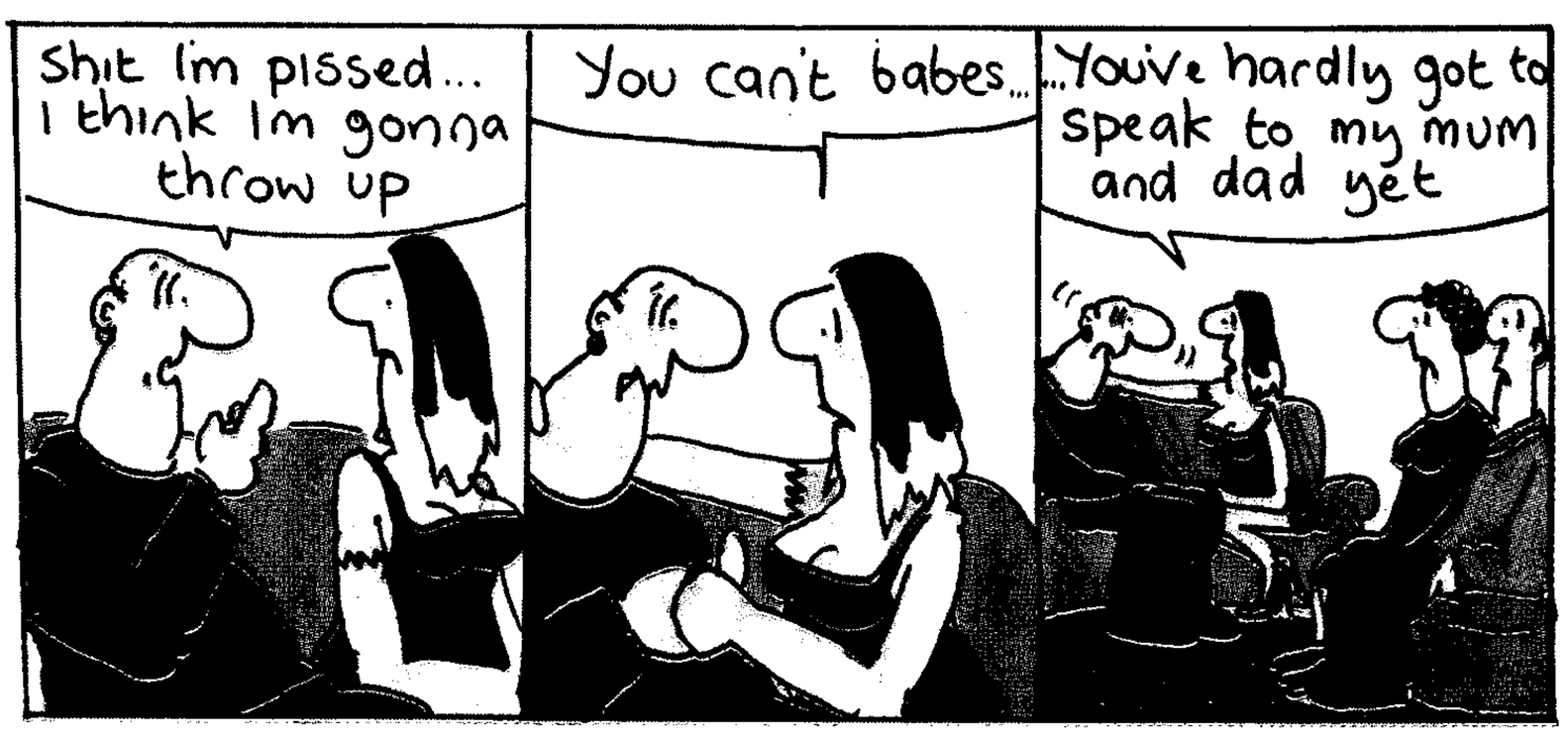
24 Spit, perhaps, from joint Brenda expelled (4)

Crossword 358 winner: NICHOLAS ROBINSON

ACROSS: 1 Stools 9 Pratfall 10 Advise 11 Narcissism 12/15 Able seamen 13 Edifying 16 Shmuck 18 Road hump 20 Snot 21 Estate duty 23 Afresh 24 Navy blue 25 Old salts 26 Regina.

DOWN: 2/5A Tars and feathers 3 Optic 4 Slapstick 5/18 Falling ratings 6 Alarm 7 Have a bash 8 Resolve 14 Faultless 15 Start over 17 Handful 19 Methuen 21 Ethel 22 Debug.

HUSBAND



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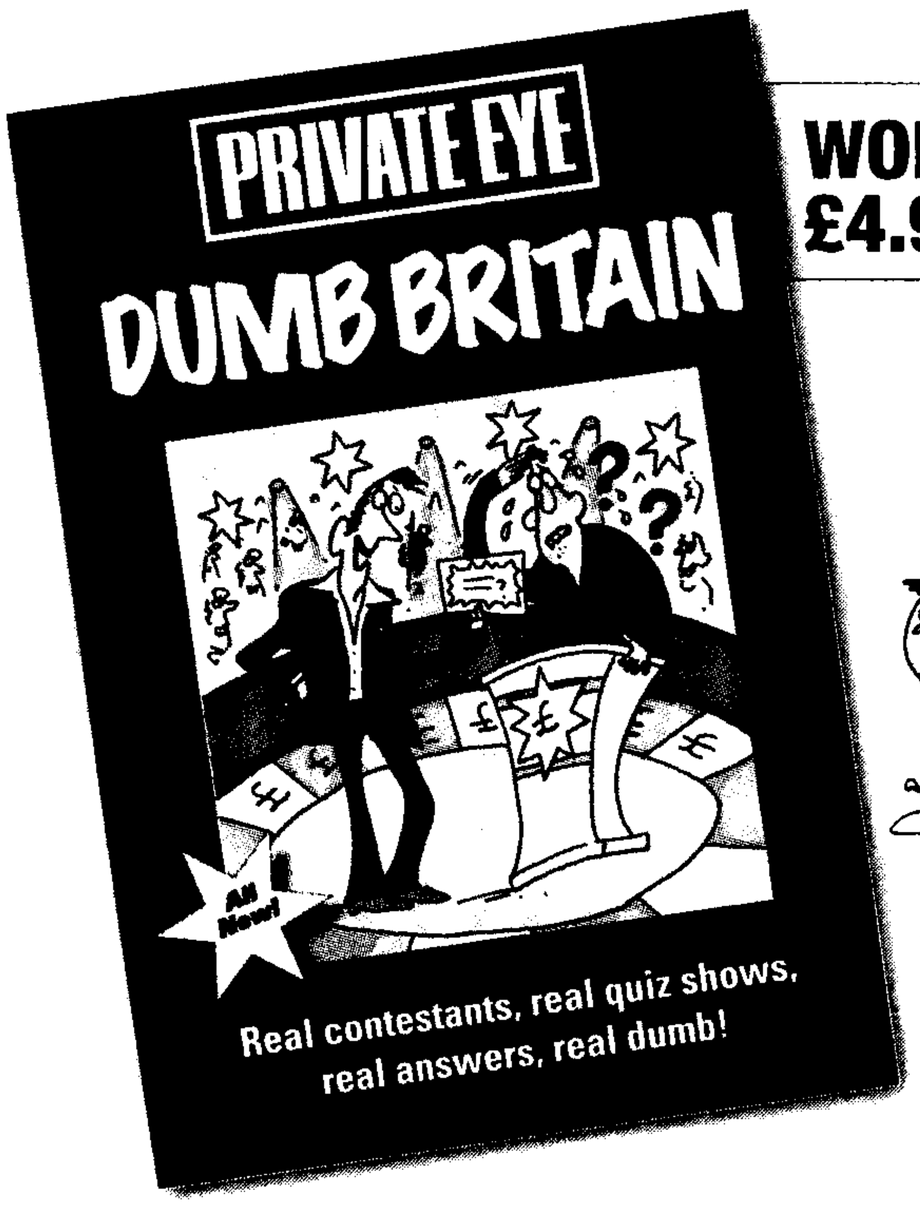

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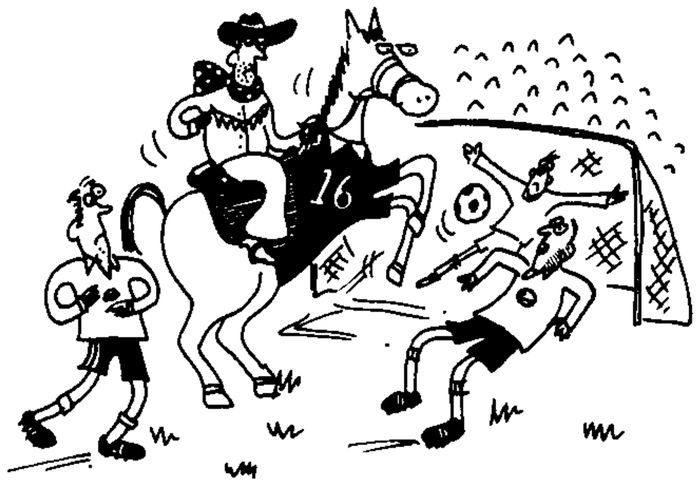
CONTESTANT: Scuba diving.
FAMILY FORTUNES



ANNE ROBINSON: He was known as the King of the Cowboys. He was Roy who?
CONTESTANT: Keane.
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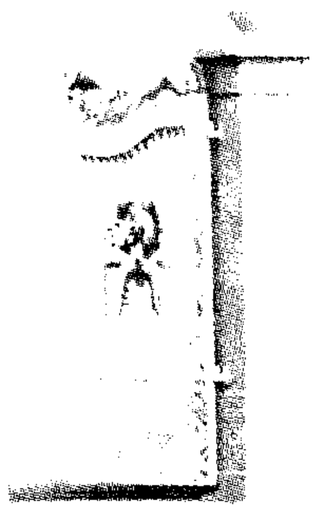

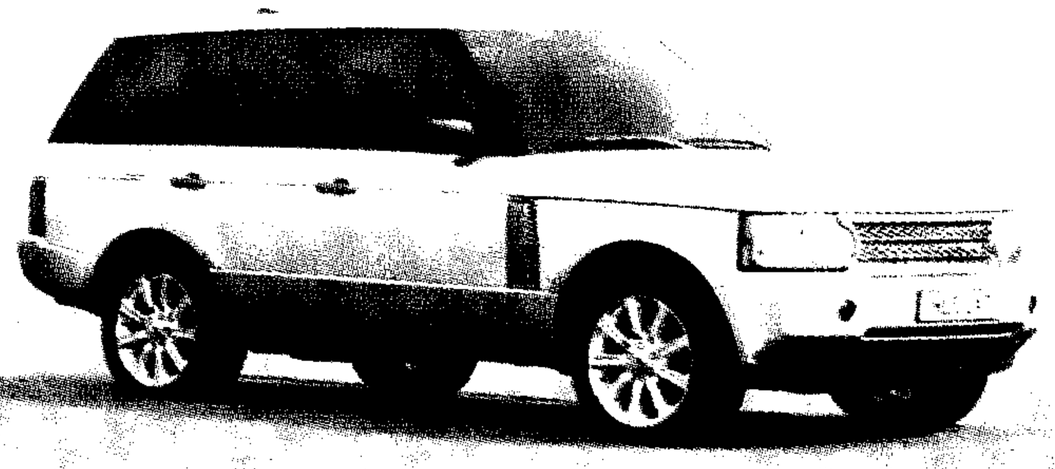

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Eye Valentine

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DEBBIE DAHLING: Better belated than never. Happy Valentine's – love Brian. xxx

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GARDENING WITH TORTOISES by P D Aspy. One woman's attempts to transport her garden, 22 tortoises, a mad parrot and her naturist husband to Spain and France. www.bluemoosebooks.com

ANTHILLS AND STARS by K Duffy. It's 1968 and the permissive society moves in next door to Mrs Hebblethwaite. She's not best pleased. www.bluemoosebooks.com

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EYES 778-TODAY, missing 792-810, 842-879. Offers to tim@timmk.eclipse.co.uk

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PLEASE HELP – we have been ripped off by a Bulgarian Developer – we are living in Bulgaria with no home. They have taken all of our money from our UK house sale. Please, please help if you can. Thank you. Halifax, S/C: 11-03-06. A/C: 00048359.

HELP, SKINT, PLEASE broke, unhappy, donations to nationwide S/C: 07-01-16. A/C: 09089113.

CROOKED TEETH needing desperate file, £2500 could restore my smile. S/C: 80-14-62. A/C: 07037923.

SPARE FUNDS? Art patron required: 15 years of savings to 'one day' become a full-time prolific painter gone... Lost everything (and more) in 5-year litigation battle. Fame and fortune not sought, just wish to fulfil artist potential. Can you help? S/C: 20-32-06. A/C: 90266760.

OFFSET CHRISTMAS DINNER AND become Exec Producer by funding beautiful Brit / Canadian goosy film. www.clearlakemovie.com. Shoot date approaching, £50k needed. S/C: 40-40-10. A/C: 31415484.

DIVORCED WORKING MOTHER of two needs help urgently to save home. Please help, in despair. Halifax, S/C: 11-05-83. A/C: 00343770.

PORTFOLIO WORKER: HIGHLY NUMERATE, university researcher, experienced administrator, seeks interesting part-time employment. Reply Box 232839.

VERY GENUINE AND LOYAL LADY been badly conned by family. Please help. S/C: 07-01-16. A/C: 30929792.

TWO LOVELY LADIES (dancer, film-maker) facing bleak February: £5k debt, bills, and no work since December. Please help. natanddi@hotmail.co.uk Barclays, S/C: 20-11-81. A/C: 20858994.

ATTEMPTED KIDNAPPING OF PRINCESS ANNE, 1975. Startling revelations about this event. See www.ianball.me.uk

STUDENT TEACHER in need of £1500 for coaching courses. Email: ric_816@yahoo.co.uk

FINAL YEAR STUDENT, in £20,000+ debt, all and any help gratefully appreciated. S/C: 53-50-41. A/C: 10331980.

SCHOLARSHIP MUSICIAN welcomes financial help with course and CD. Reply Box 233139.

WRITER/MUSICIAN, two disabled sons; 20 years in poverty. £6,000 will publish first book. Please help. Reply to Box 233434.

SUCCESSFUL PROFESSIONAL BUSINESSMAN seeks attractive female Spurs supporter to co-write comedy play! Reply to Box 233692.

HARD WORKING COUPLE, been scammed by unethical franchise. We have an autistic son to build a future for, need up to £90,000 to re-enter business life. Any contributions very gratefully received. S/C: 60-05-22. A/C: 71803327.

SEEKING BENEFACTOR. REFORMED wild boy now on track seeks limited funding and advice for life's perils. alex@wrappeduk.com

£5,000 NEEDED to collect international social enterprise stories on inspirational website, sharing skills and ideas for practical social change. Please email: sara.haq@virgin.net

PLEASE HELP HUMBLE FAMILY buy a home. S/C: 20-96-89. A/C: 00292370.

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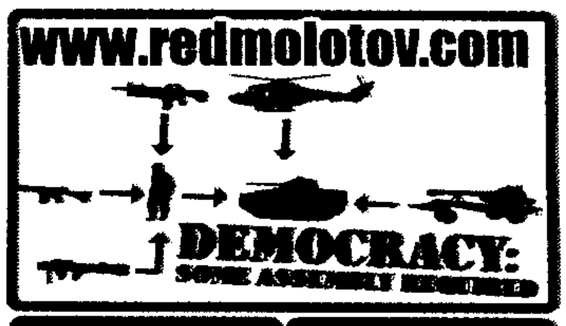

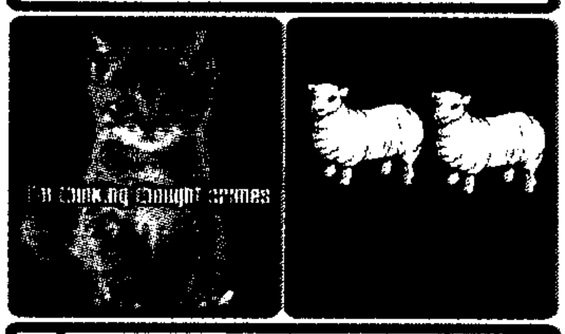

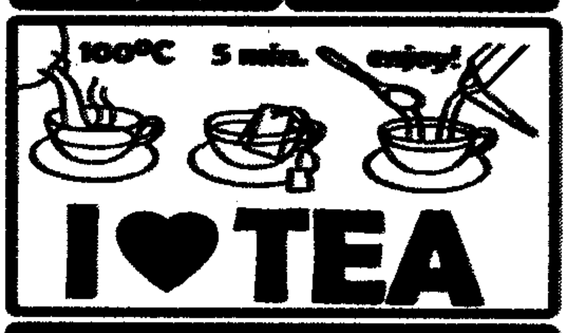

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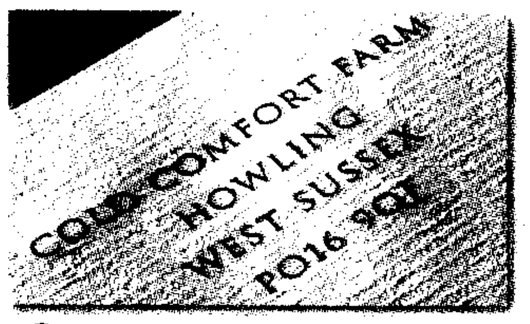

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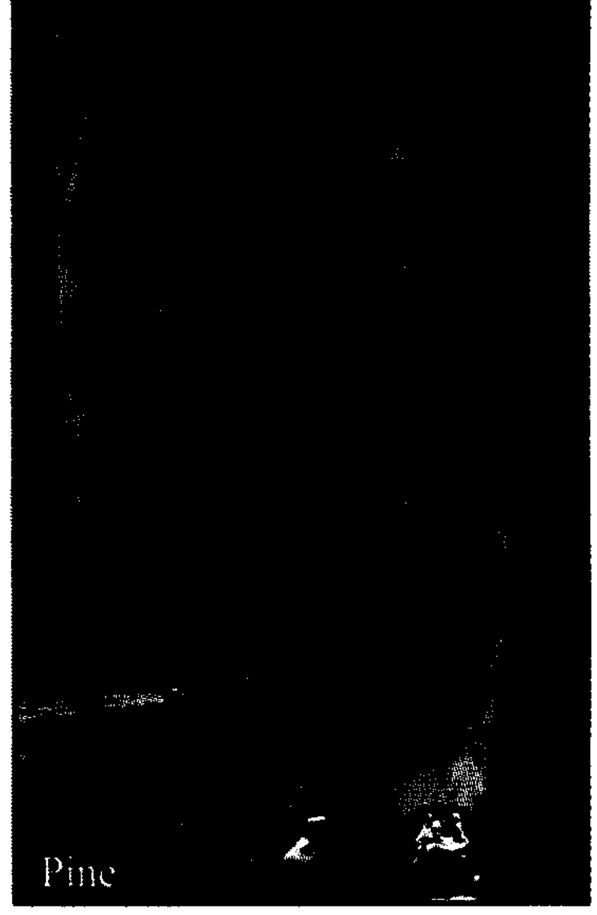

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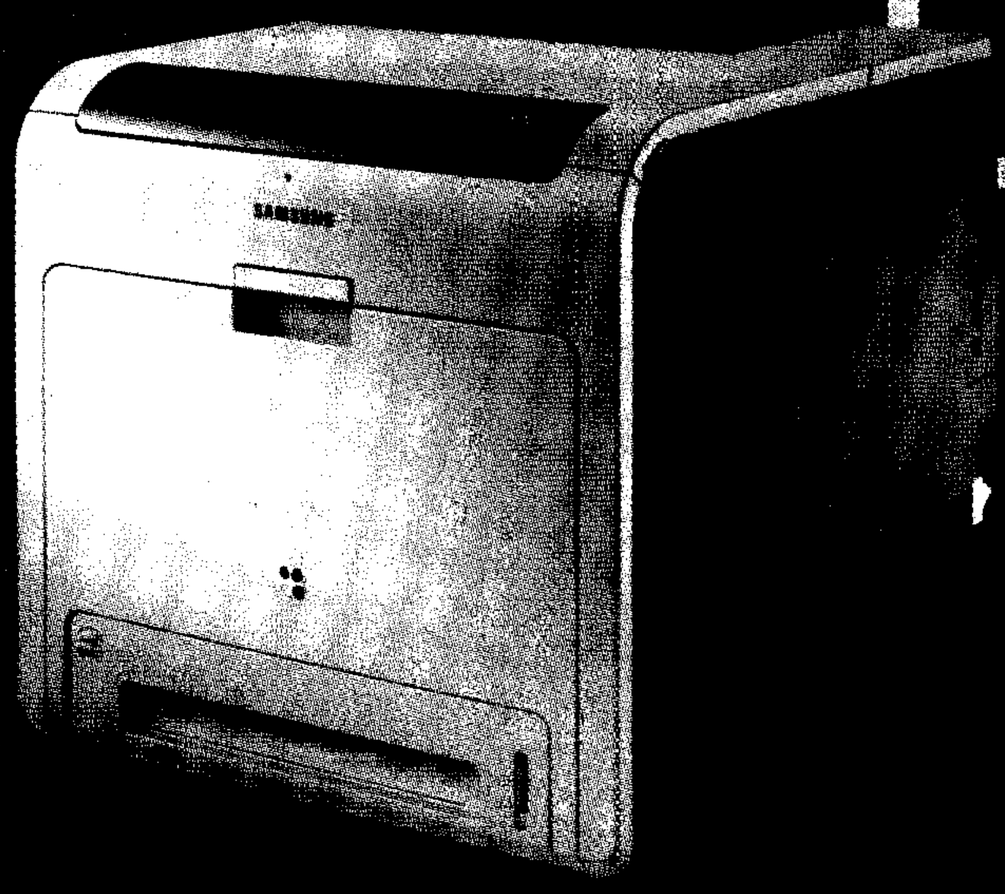

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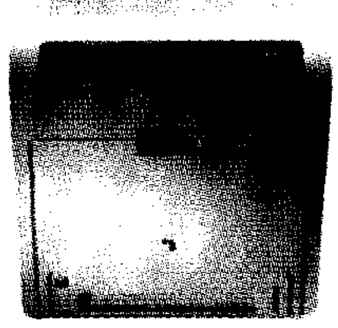

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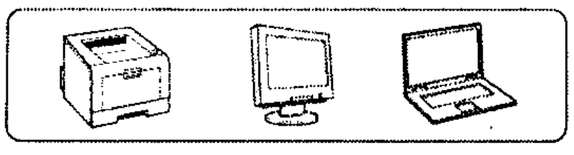

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